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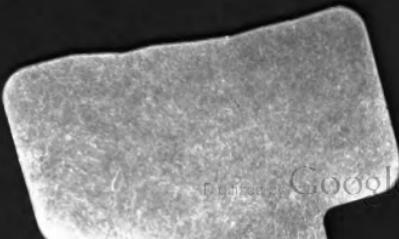
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QUEEN ALCYONE;

Or, "NON ANGLI, SED ANGELI."





QUEEN ALCYONE;

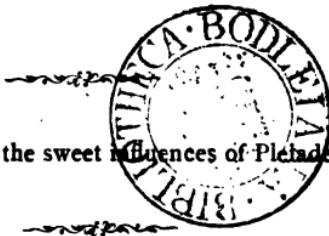
Or, "NON ANGLI, SED ANGELI,"

AN ALLEGORY.

BY

MRS. T. H. PASSMORE.

"Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades?"



LONDON :
ELLIOT STOCK, 62 PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

1877.

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251. c. 580
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'They are in Hebrew called Chimah, or Chamah, to love ardently, because of the fellowship and working together that appeareth in them. . . . and like seven sisters or lovers, so are they joined together . . . in one company.'

TRAPP.

'After a profound examination,' Mädler, rejecting the hypothesis of the existence of a central body, preponderating in mass, as the universal centre of gravity,' reaches the conclusion, that' 'the lucida,' 'Alcyone, the principal star in the group of the Pleiades,' 'in the very centre of this group,' 'now occupies the centre of gravity, and is at present the' 'bright' 'sun about which the universe of stars composing our astral system are all revolving.'

HUMBOLDT. MITCHELL. WEBB.

' . . . seven of the daughters of Atlas . . . ! They all, except Merope, who' . . . 'became invisible because . . . '

'Mythological Origin' of the Pleiades.





The writer of the following Allegory fore-
bears offering to its reader, by way of
preface, any explanatory notice of the many
intents it is designed should be conveyed
under the guise of the varied imagery
employed, in the hope that the purpose
throughout held in view will be found, not
only in its entirety, but also in its every
detail, manifestly revealed by the nature and
handling of the conceits themselves.

AVENUE-GATE, DULWICH WOOD PARK,
NORWOOD, DECEMBER, 1876.





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NON ANGLI, SED ANGELI.



CHAPTER I.



Queen Alcyone.



B



HE Queen! the Queen! just like
a gnat's trumpet. The Queen!
the Queen! just like the rushing
hum of music in a cowrie-shell.
The Queen! the Queen! just
like the whispering among the leaves when
the wind is coming up.

Then it changed to the sound of the opening
of flowers, and the blossoms shook their dainty
faces to the early dawn, and the dawn called
up pearls to deck the flowers' faces, and when
they all were dressed in gems, the buzz of wel-
come rustled on again; and, as it sounded, no
train of royalty appeared, no prancing steeds,
no banners and spears, but a hazy mist rose
among the leaves and feathery ferns, and the

mist grew larger and more defined ; and as it grew it gathered shape, such shape as it is not often given to the eyes of men to see—a cluster of seven creatures, all rosy and fleecy white, angel-like, yet with a sweet semblance of maidenhood resting on them. But look at the centre of the group, and you must rub your eyes afterwards, for they will smart and tingle just as if you had fixed them on a carcanet of diamonds whilst the sun shone.

It is a thing like a young girl, but light and intangible as a fleck of spray, small and radiant, and beautiful as never man beheld since the day when the first fair woman quitted the garden which was planted eastward in Eden ; so soft and rounded that she might have been dew wrought into womanhood, so radiant and gleaming that she might have been created from the twinkling light of one of heaven's now fast-fading jewels. She bore in her hand a golden wand, and a bright living star shimmered at its tip ; a star, too, was on her brow, and

above her marvellous head a circlet of fireflies wheeled round and round, their lambent gleam her only crown. Again the gnat's trumpet, the cowrie's hum, and the leaves' whisper-sound. Why lo ! this is the mingled speech of the thousand courtiers of the Queen of *A*ether Land, and their voices are ringing more musically than the voices of courtiers ever rang before, and the laughter of one of the maids of honour plays upon the air like the singing of a thrush after a shower at day-break.

‘ Ha, ha, ha !’ cried the sprightly maiden ; ‘ he tried hard to catch me ; and then another came, and puffed me away from the first with a puff as bleak as the north wind, but I kept away from him, as far as he had sent me from the first ; and then he beat the air for anger, and I tossed first near one and then near the other, and then right up into the air, far above their big round heads.’

‘ Ah ! my Merope,’ cried the Queen, ‘ thou

deemest in thy childish merriment that mortals live to be the sport of atoms! Did the big people really try to catch thee?"

'Ay, ay, my Queen,' answered Merope, 'else mine would have been wasted play. But look you, my Queen—I took, as I sported in the lively air, the shape of that little devil men are so fond of, the shape of praise; and oh, how those two who chased me scowled each at his neighbour!—but up, up into the high air I went, for I was in a good temper just then, and I did not want to injure the poor slugs.'

'Dear Maia,' said the Queen, 'I think that a very small fly is near me, on my forehead perhaps, for I hear a sort of buzzing. Will you try to make it quiet.'

Maia's fingers swept softly over the Queen's brow, but no fly was there; so Merope was silent, for she fancied the Queen by her words rebuked her for her constant prattle. Then Maia's voice broke forth, like the mur-

mur of sweet waters, and she said, while yet smoothing the Queen's brow,—

'I, too, became as Praise. I watched a lark as it mounted up into the arched sky, and with it I rose, and I came forth as a song from that bird's throat, and we soared together to the very eye of that great beautiful star which is all day shining in the blue heavens, and there the lark rested on its quivering wings and listened to me as I went yet further, and reached an Ear which was beyond that star; and It bowed down, and I knew myself accepted; and, feeling this, my praise-song trembled gladly; and, as it rose and fell, it fluttered to the hearing of a pale, sad mortal maiden, who, with a heavy burden, was toiling painfully along the sandy plain below; and she lifted up her eyes to heaven, and then her voice blended itself with mine, and when I saw her face again the weary look had passed away, for *her* praise-song had brought her back upon its wings a peaceful, blissful smile.'

While Maia spoke, the Queen had lain listening to her with a look of love; and Merope, whose mouth had not throughout lost the little pout which the Queen's appropriated rebuke had called up, had listened too; but now that the voice had ceased, she forgot her cause of pouting, and broke into a peal of mischievous laughter.

'Oh, what a merry tale!—what a merry tale!' she cried. 'Nay, Maia, you are too dull; go and join the big people; we shall do better without you. Dear lady Queen, do—do tell her to go.'

'My Maia,' said the Queen, taking no heed to the laughter-loving maiden's speech, 'it seemed to me that thy star was brighter than its wont; and now I know that it was the smile of that wan mortal which bestowed on thee thy added radiance. Was she so very sad and weary?'

'Very sad and very weary, my Queen,' replied Maia, 'until her praise-song had as-

cended, and then it was as if the burden which she bore were lifted from her shoulder, or rather—for it was still there—as if another aided her to carry it.'

'Celæno,' said the Queen, '*thy* star is gleaming; wherefore, wherefore?'

And Celæno answered; 'I saw a little child weeping, and, knowing not why I did it, for it was a wild fancy, I taught her to kneel down and clasp her two hands together, and to lift up her eyes; and the tiny thing soon left weeping, and, curling herself upon the grass, fell into slumber; and I think, O Queen, that the child breathed upon my brow.'

Whilst Celæno spoke, a patter as of little feet had beaten time to all her words, and now a shiny, whisking thing came round among the fern-leaves, and stood before the Queen.

'Quink comes with news of mirth,' cried Merope. 'Oh, tell us quickly, Quink!'

Quink saluted, that is, he veiled for an

instant, with duteous wing, the starry speck upon his brow.

‘Beautiful Queen!’ he said, ‘thy servant has heard the sound of a heavy tramp drawing near to thy sacred court. He fears for thy royal pleasure should one steal in unawares;—tell him, O Queen, thy will.’

‘It is one who comes for a gift,’ replied the Queen. ‘Good Quink, thou art a careful sentinel. We await the stranger’s coming.’

‘By the ears of Dan Faunus,’ cried Merope; ‘thou art a worthy Quink. Save us! we shall laugh at last! Oh, Merope is glad!’

* * * *

Wherefore are the mystic maidens now grouped around their bright Queen? and why do the royal fireflies wheel their constant circling dance about her head this morning? —for it is only on high state days that these gather themselves into a living crown. Listen.

Besides the soft hum of winged insects and the cool rustle of leaves, there comes a sound, from far beyond the favoured glen wherein the immortals tryst, as of melodious joybells in the distance—joybells that are ringing out sweet notes, wherewith the very wafting air seems pleased. It is no new-year's carol now borne on the gentle breeze; nor is it the closing cadence of the jubilant chorale, sometime sent upwards by the sons of men, in remembrance of that sung by angelic lips, when the Great Life which pervades all things was made flesh to dwell among us. Yet angels look down for prayers this morn, joyfully to lay before the Throne; and those who, unseen, group themselves about our lower sphere, watchful of us for good or ill, are, as ever, eager for sweet acts of beneficence, be it only to cause a blossom to fall at a weary foot, or a soft breath to fan a fevered brow.—Now, at the dawn of the year's mid-day, as at the hour of its chilly birth, come

to the ferny brake, and of Queen Alcyone
ask a boon which may not be denied! And
lo! one who seeks it is approaching.

* * * *

The young maidens all looked up, for a shadow fell upon their robes—just fell athwart their silvery garments, as though the passing shade of a tall tree had been, by the circling journey of the moon, cast over them. It was not a gloomy shadow, for youth and hope and strength were in it, and, when the maidens looked up, they saw one, young, hopeful, and strong; one whose limbs were lithe and firm, but whose face was very grave and earnest. That face, when any scanned it slightly, had not the beauty in it which maidens look askance to trace, it had not the softness which proclaims their power, it had not the grand beauty which asserts its own. It was a plain, unlovely face, but one on which the world's hand had not been laid: albeit an unjewelled

mirror, yet was it unsullied by the pride of earth.

Merope decided in one glance that the stranger who drew near was neither gay nor graceful, so she turned from him; but stroked in seeming negligence the folded feathers of one white wing, by which fantastic toying action she hoped to win his notice.

And he, the new comer, abashed at the beauty of the Queen and her court, bowed low and shamefacedly, and seemed for the space of a moment irresolute and ill-at-ease; but the longing, steadfast look came back upon his countenance, and, as the Queen smiled encouragement, well-nigh below his breath, and with another lowly salutation, he said,—

‘A boon, O lady Queen—a boon!’

‘Declare thy boon, O lowly servant,’ replied the Queen.

But the young man faltered in his asking, and again the Queen spoke.

‘Thy boon awaits thy asking; doubt

not that it is thine. Wherefore dost thou fear?’

And the young man said,—

‘I would fight in a worthy cause—I would strive for a worthy prize. Give me, O Queen, a battle to win, and I am thy soldier and servant unto the end.’

And the Queen smiled, and replied,—

‘A cause to fight for!—a battle to win! —a prize to gain! Didst thou need, O young man, to come to Alcyone for such unenvied gifts? Nay, look back on thy own path hither: were there no enemies to conquer there? Ha! I hear the clashing of swords even here in my magic kingdom; I feel the deep breathing of sighs on mine own unaging cheek.’

So the suppliant looked very sad, for he thought the Queen forbade his prayer, and he cried,—

‘Ah, bright, beautiful Queen!—my boon: you promised me my boon!’

Then the Queen answered slowly and gravely,—

‘Thy boon thou shalt have; a warfare thou shalt fight, whereat the stoutest do quake; a race thou shalt run, wherein the strong man faints; and thou, O lowly servant, shalt be smitten, but not unto death —thou shalt be cast down, but never forsaken.’

And the young man bowed down, even upon his knees. And lo! he who had knelt, clothed in the dusky garments of toil, now heard himself named by a new name, heard himself called of a new master, and arose to find himself armed as a knight ready for the battle—ay, even to his shield.

While he had been kneeling, he had looked eastward to the glorious sun, which brings light and life to all, and on whose wings the healing of the nations rests; and the rising sun had cast upon the young knight its first radiant beams; and of that

bright shining light a ray had centred on the just bestowed shield, and had there tarried, and it had quivered and burnt into the metal a deep-red, fiery cross—a cross which the soldier now took up and bore upon his shoulder—a cross whose flaming glow should call forth the enmity of many, and whose crimson sign should never die out, but should strengthen and protect the bearer throughout the long battle which he had arisen to fight! And so, clothed in mail of proof, and trusting in the whole armour wherewith he had been equipped, he stood upright before the just-risen day, strong in the light of a holier Sun, strong in the power of His mightier shining. And within his veins he felt a new life throb, and in his ear sounded a voice, saying,—

‘ Bearing thy shield, come unto thy Leader, and unto the knowledge of a perfect man—unto the stature of the measure of the fulness of thy Chief.’

And the young knight took his keen sword

in his hand, and girded it on his thigh, and reverently laid his hand over the red cross which was glowing on his shield, and bowing down his head towards the living fire where-with the symbol burned, he said,—

‘I follow Thee !’

And the weight of his armour was as naught upon his limbs ; for, though he was all unused to such a burden, already it had become to him both light and easy.

He turned himself about to bend before the wand of power which Queen Alcyone bore—he turned himself about to do homage to her mystic majesty—but whither had she sped ? The bright Queen and her bright maidens had vanished away—the lambent glow of fireflies had disappeared—the sparkling stars upon those maidens' brows, ah ! where shone they now ? There where lately the Queen's throne had glistened, a pale iris wavered in the tremulous air, stately among the ferns. The glory of the newly-risen sun seemed to the young

knight as a faint gleam, compared with the near and incomparable brightness which with the day's dawn had departed.

Ah! thou new-made warrior, thy fealty now is due to another liege, thy obedience to another sovereign; look not for the Queen of whom thy boon was sought, for a greater than Alcyone is here!

So the young man looked in vain for Queen Alcyone and her court, listening for their voices; but he only heard the clear song as of a lark warbling high in the morning air, and, as he hearkened, it pierced the blue æther and came not back again, for it was a praise-song that he heard, and such return not in their own semblance; and the young knight, steel-clad and armed, sought to trace with his eyes the bird whose song seemed still thrilling in his ear, but it had mounted higher than his vision could reach; and then, as he stood with his shield upon his shoulder, and his hand upon his sword, his sweet human voice went up as a

memorial before the Day-star that was on high, and his praise-song entered the holy place, where four-and-twenty were falling down before Him who heard, and were crying,—

‘Thou art worthy! ’

So the sword of that young knight was sharpened.





CHAPTER II.

Anglos the Woodman.





TOW dearly the children of men love —some, the lofty hills—some, the wondrous stars—some, the wild, glorious sea; they love them well, for there is high brotherhood in all, there is a deep union throughout; they are but as varying chords on one mighty instrument, as differing glimpses of one all-pervading power—such chords as stir the souls of men, such glimpses as make their lives divine.

Throughout all creation one voice prevails—one holy voice, whether it trembles on an infant's lips in its earliest murmured 'Abba,' or is flung abroad over the great arc of heaven from the thunder's deep and dreadful organ-pipe.

If man listened still more to nature's hymn —to the roar of the foaming cataract, to the singing of birds on a sweet summer's eve, to the noise of the rushing wind when God's breath has gone forth, to the humming of insects among the scented pine-trees—then more gladly would he speak the Name which the sweet unknowing babble of his own child, as it murmurs in its Eden-tongue, might teach him, and, looking up on high, he would learn to sob forth his weakness in the one strong word 'Father.' Made in a higher image than all, yet is his voice often silent, and, at best, he is slow of speech, and of a feeble tongue ; whilst they, the un-died-for, the unredeemed, roll upwards a mighty praise-wave to heaven, giving back to Him who less richly has meted out to them.

It is but a little that at best man *can* give —one glance of faith, perhaps one active thought of charity, and one impulse of hope ; and up—beyond the sun, beyond the clus-

tering of myriads of stars ; beyond unknown systems, beyond each island universe, un-reached by the vision, and unfathomed by the mind of mortal ;—that upward glance, that unselfish thought, and that hope, have arisen trembling to the Throne.

Sure a kingdom's heir should be obedient to the king, and are we not heirs ?—sure brothers should love their elder brother, and are we not brethren ?—sure children should revere their father, and as certain of the poets have said, we are also His offspring.

And, though now a little lower than the angels, yet honour and glory, such as man can find not for his fellow, are waiting for redeemed brows, thereon crown-like to be laid by the hand of the Most High, eternally to shine with unimaginable light, studded with the reflections of the smile of God.

And wherefore this great reward ? For just a simple trust—a trust in that victorious Captain, who, returning from a mightier war-

fare arrayed in the greatness of His strength, leads us on to the battle, while over us floats the banner of His love; who teaches us how to wear worthily throughout the fight the armour wherewith He has equipped us, while we are sustained by His glorious arm; who enables us to press forward surely toward the prize which His own unspeakable conquest has placed within our reach; and who, when the strife is over and done, will bestow upon us the never-ending peaceful rest of unhindered praise and service. Then, soldiers, let us, with untiring ardour, struggle on unto the end; looking, with a simple trust, to our great Leader for all needed help: let us watch through a brief while for the opening on our conquering spirits of the blissful eternity which awaits us.

Now, just before that bright day-dawn which had arisen in vision upon the dream-wrapt senses of Anglos the woodman, when he had seemed to bow down in hope before a

fancied Queen, and to obtain his eagerly-sought boon, it chanced that he had been working hard, and that his toil had wearied him overmuch, so that he had lain himself down beneath the tree whose boughs he had been lopping, and soon had slept ; his heart had felt weary, and he had thought, ere he slept,—

‘All through my life I must work on like this, and the bread which I eat satisfies me not, and the water which I drink—lo ! I am afterwards thirsty. My hands are dusky and stained with labour, and I cannot cleanse them. And, if I were rich, the moth and rust would corrupt my treasures, or another stronger than I would steal them from me.’

And it was as he had thought thus that he had fallen asleep. Long and sweetly he slept —a cool breeze fanned him, and dew softer than a mother’s kiss settled on his forehead ; and strange fair things, which to his waking vision would have been unseen, hovered round about him as he lay. Little wist he what they

were as they came and went. And a voice strangely sweet entered with power at the portal of his ear, saying—‘Arise, *Angelos*, servant and soldier !’

Then, with the dew of his new calling lingering on his brow, he rose up and found himself a servant—but whom his master? A soldier, but where his battle-field? He looked upon his hands, and the stains which had defaced them were cleansed away, and he was clean every whit. Then he remembered old tales, tales which from his early boyhood had been woven into his imagination—stories of gifts which were waiting to be given, rich boons which asking should procure; and, as he stood, a smile of new-born inner joy broke upon his toil-roughened features, and his eyes sparkled with burning zeal: he had lain down awhile ago sorrowful at the prospect of his unlighted future, which now, however, as he gazed onward, lay before him, hazy indeed, but having new rays of hope shining upon its

outline. He kneeled down upon the grass, and a wordless prayer of thanksgiving, whose solemn breath fell back upon him like the oil of consecration, burst from his untutored soul and flew to the bosom of the great King.

Angelos!—Anglos no longer!—thy boon indeed is granted; and more, for against the helmet which thou shalt wear, the sword wherewith thou shalt be girded, and the shield which shall rest upon thy shoulder, the very gates of hell may not prevail.

Then the words of Queen Alcyone returned upon his ear like a song's echo—‘Were there not foes in thine own path hither? I hear the clash of their swords; I feel the breath of their sighing.’ And he went home, and took his accustomed place in his mother’s cottage.

And his mother was there, sitting close by the window to catch all of the waning evening light; a delicate white fabric fell over her left

hand, whilst the right was nimbly adding to its beauty by many an intricate tedious stitch. Cowering over the now fireless hearth in a low wooden chair, was another woman, the young man's sister, who did not lift up her face when he entered, nor did the slow swinging motion with which her head swayed from side to side even for an instant become stilled: she was ceaselessly twisting and untwisting her hands, and now and again she lapsed into a strange laugh, which might for its sadness have been sobbing, save for her lack of tears.

Her brother looked at her face earnestly for a moment, and then turning, said, 'Mother!'

'My son!' she replied. Then they were silent for awhile. Presently she went on—
'My son, art thou hungry?'

'No, mother,' answered the young man.
'Mother,' he continued, after a pause—'how have ye—thou, and Ellice my sister—fared, this while?'—for to him it seemed that he had been absent well-nigh two days.

The woman lifted her eyes from her work, and looked at her son inquiringly, as though she did not comprehend his meaning.

‘This while, my son?—what while? It was noonday when thou last wentest forth, and the red glow of the setting sun has not yet left the sky.’ Then, going on with her work, she added slowly,—‘What time meanest thou? —the time that I have wrought lace for the Lady Ullamere, or the time since thou hast been son and husband to me—ay, too, and father to my poor sweet darkened one?’

‘Mother,’ he replied gently, ‘I mean this time, since I went away—some of yesterday and all to to-day, until now.’

At these words his mother’s hands stopped, her work fell into her lap, and her face blanched with horrible fright; she cried out, ‘Yesterday?—to-day? What! art thou, my one stay and blessing, smitten too? Whither can I turn for help?’

‘Mother,’ said the young man, rising up and standing by her side, ‘wherefore dost thou fear?’

And, as he spoke these words, their breath upon his lips startled him, for they were not his own, he had received them from another; and now, as they fell upon his mother’s ear, she looked up into her son’s face, and grew calm, for his visage was still and lofty in its unquivering peacefulness. And as he stood with his hand about his mother’s neck, still hushing and soothing her, it was borne in upon his soul that it was to his own inner self alone that his new vocation was manifested: yet he questioned himself.

Absent and present!—there and here! And as he recalled the marvels of those sleep-born moments, it seemed to him as though his glittering armour were still upon his body, and as if his spirit were still bowing before his unseen leader; yet, aware that he was standing by his mother’s side, he saw that these things

could not be, then he stooped down and kissed her forehead.

'Ah, my boy, my Anglos! I was frightened, I was foolish!' she said.

'Mother,' said her son, 'not Anglos, but Angelos.'

'Not Anglos?' cried the mother. 'Thou art my son Anglos—my child, thy father's child, our child, our Anglos!'

'Ay, mother,' replied the young man; 'Anglos I *was*, but am not now. The name of Angelos came upon me in my sleep, and dew from heaven fell upon me.'

'Nay,' cried the woman, throwing her slight arm round the young man's neck, and drawing passionately his face to hers—'nay, thou *art* my Anglos; none shall steal thee from me, none shall tear thee away; that only is thy name; thy father taught thy soft child-hand to fix the arrow in its place, then thou wert Anglos—now, when thy swift dart can

strike down the strong eagle in its flight, art thou Anglos no longer?"

'Mother,' he answered, slowly and gravely, 'the mark whereat my arrow must fly is too high for the eagle's wing to reach. My arm is all too weak and uncertain now, but it will grow strong and true; so call me Angelos. Mother, lay the hands which have often rested there again upon my head, for the dew of blessing which descended in my sleep renders more holy that which thou canst invoke. So call me Angelos; the new sonship which I have taken on me binds closer my close tie to thee. I am not less thine in that I belong to another, but more thine in that I am sworn to that other. So call me Angelos, and lay thine hands upon me, mother, and bless me.'

And he knelt down before his mother, and, as he bade her, she laid her two hands upon his head, and, sobbing, blessed him; and she spoke in a solemn voice:—

'Even as thou hast said, may thine arm be

made strong, mine own fond son'—and, pausing, she added, ‘Angelos.’ Then falling upon his neck, in a passion of tears, weeping, she kissed him.

Lovingly, with his arms enfolding her, he comforted and soothed the widowed heart, speaking no words, only letting her weep upon his breast, only tightening his grasp and drawing her closer, or stroking her hair with his gentle man’s fingers ; and gradually his strong tenderness calmed her, and her head lay still. Presently, when she looked up, Ellice, who had risen noiselessly and had crossed the room from the hearth to the window, was standing by her side. She did not speak, or even look at her mother or her brother, but stood still, with one finger on her full soft under-lip : her face, ever colourless, but as tenderly rounded as a child’s, had no line of care, no trace of trouble on its pale, unwrinkled surface. Her straight glossy hair was drawn carefully back from her white small ears, and knotted

in a coil behind, leaving her forehead quite bare, and the curve of the slender eyebrows unbroken ; and now her large dark eyes were raised to the clouds in the glorious west—was she seeking for a glimpse of her spirit's home as her eyes rested on those western clouds ?

It seems to me, that, when the gem which is created by the breathing of the Infinite is not lodged within this fleshly casket, the whole being is complete and perfect in its powers, even as others, save in its highest part, which, although apportioned, is yet with God—stored up as a peculiar jewel, to crown, when immortality shall dawn, the breathing thing who in this world was dark and void.

Dream, may we, then, of such first union of the earthly with the heavenly—of the glad springing up of the hitherto unlighted clay, not to be re-united with the spirit, but for its earliest investiture ; when all of death is swallowed up in all of glorified life, and the soul breaks forth from the tabernacle of majesty

wherein it had been shrouded, to abide for ever in its prepared and purified chamber. These surely shall for ever, as they walk the golden streets, shine with a whiter and brighter radiance than those, whether saints, patriarchs, or martyrs, whose spirits have been tarnished by this world's breath, though washed with a washing which has all power to cleanse. Gently and reverently should we, with our intellect, minister to those to whom the light of reason is denied, for in the purity of Christ their soul's life is hidden away with the Father.

This girl, this sister of Angelos, throughout her still life had been thus cherished and won up to womanhood, and had been doubly dear to his strong, vigorous soul from his pity for her unbroken darkness. She had ever sat on their threshold, or crouched by their fireside, or lain down to rest in her peaceful guarded chamber, as a special holy charge from the gentle Giver of all good gifts. There, as Ellice stood, with her finger laid on

her lip, and her great soft, unwondering, unhoping, unfearing eyes raised to the now reddening sky, her whole tale was told. None would have asked, ‘Art thou sad, Ellice?’ or, ‘Ellice, dost thou rejoice?’ Joy and sorrow were but as one word to her, and the page of her mind was as a white blank sheet, whereon the finger of God had not written, but whose fair surface man had no power to blot.

She was even as an unlighted lamp of classic mould, not yet placed in her allotted niche, passively waiting to be lifted up by hands tender and unseen, and, when so exalted, to receive meekly into the clean chamber within the divine fire as yet withheld.

After standing by her mother and Angelos for many minutes, Ellice turned, and went and leaned against the open door; and the breath of the sigh of Angelos was wafted past her far away.





CHAPTER III.

Evangile.





NOTHER mother and another son stood together in that hour—stood by a deep embayed window, which showed through its foliated tracery and richly-tinted panes, the dark massive boughs of a mighty cedar-tree, the benediction of whose extended arms cast soft shadow far around ; and, in that cedar's shade, slowly, thoughtfully, walked one on whom a darker shadow had already fallen—a shadow which spares not the young in its troubling—a shadow which passes not away from the old in the time of their grey hairs, but which, when it is greeted as a friend, absorbs not the inner light of the one whom it visits, but causes that light to beam forth with a more holy radiance from

contrast with its own dark garments. From the same Power proceed both the white light of the heart's patient purity, and the gloomy raiment of external trouble. What matters it whether the pillar be of fire or of cloud? What matters it to us, so that we follow its guiding token?—then there will be no fear of our road, for it leads to a land, far off indeed, but surely gained if we tread on calmly, believing that our way is certain, and that when reached our dwelling is sure.

The maiden who walked beneath the cedar-tree—her home, where was it?—her kindred, where were they? She walked in the garden of strangers, she dwelt in a stranger's home, and for her nation's darkness she was sad. She was the daughter of a transgressing people, the child of an erring house, a pilgrim from a distant country—alone she had come to seek a welcome, for those of her household were divided against her, her own received her not.

Those who stood in the embayed window looked forth as the young pensive head passed beneath; and the arms of the cedar swayed to the casement, approaching where the mother and her son stood. The mother was a stately lady, the son a noble-browed, sweet-eyed man, just one of those of whom a mother or a king is proud—a king, in that his kingdom can boast so strong a citadel—a mother, in that he calls her mother. They stood together, and the lady's high, proud visage was melted to a dewy tenderness. She was finishing a sentence,—

‘Hot sands, long marches, burning suns ; remember, Trisalonde, thy mother and thyself.’

‘Nay, my mother,’ replied the young knight, —‘thou shouldest say, “Thy mother and thy king.” I will think me that I bear in my bosom thy heart, and that I wear on my body his arms ; and so, I will vanquish his foes, and return again to thee.’

‘Yes, yes, my son !’ replied his mother, with an eager voice; ‘think that my heart is in thy breast, then thou wilt guard it well. Thou wilt not let thy foes scathe thy mother’s heart, my Trisalonde.’

‘Mother,’ returned the son, gravely, ‘thou wouldst not have mine faint; then do not weep. Let me see thy mouth smiling, and thine eyes serene, lest my hand trembles when my firm lance should strike the helmet of the foe. And *wherefore* those tears? When I was brought forth, didst thou not forget thine anguish for joy that a man was born into the world?—and have not the footsteps of the fathers of my race ever been followed by the impotent curses of the wrong-doer; while the blessings which the oppressed have invoked on them,—have they been withheld? Then shall my feet tread a new path? Shall I thrust my arm into a silken sleeve, and ride forth with a hooded falcon on my wrist? Would that be my mother’s pride?’

Would that add new lustre to the bright honour of our house?’

What wonder was it, that, on hearing her son, the head of that house, so speak, the face of the lady Ullamere should catch a tinge of his fervour; that her yet smooth forehead should flush like the sunset sky; that her lip should break away into a proud smile; that the soft, maternal light which was in her dark eyes should change to a sparkle as of triumph at glory already won. And was she not justified? Mothers! wherein do ye glory, save in the honour of your sons?—ay, and in their tender, loving gentleness, for it is only the truly strong that are among men the truly gentle with that blessed gentleness, which, whether in son or husband, winds itself around a woman’s frailty, a sanctuary wherein she may rest, and, so resting, praise God—and so resting, pour forth her own devoted love, an holy libation, well pleasing to the Most High.

Mother, wife, or maiden, know ye this love,

this trusting, holding love, to draw closely to, to lean fondly on—love which is sweeter than life—love which will clasp ye tighter than the grave! When our father and our mother went forth from their so late happy seat, this love was the one attribute of God, which, with them, passed beyond the brandished sword which blazed at the closing portals of Eden ; the one remnant of the image in which they had been made ; the one source of rest which Providence had left.

What wonder, then, that the face of the lady Ullamere wore that flush of pride ; and that with lip and eye she should proclaim her joy, for her triumph was already won. No need of golden spurs ; no need of the guerdon of a great king's ‘well done !’ no need of the joyful acclamations of a saved people, for the unspotted heart and the unstained brow of her son were in her sight more noble garniture than the broad baldric of an earl. And her voice arose, and she blessed her knightly son

with the earnest, hopeful blessing which a mother bestows on him who is her one stay, her goodly gift.

Then again Sir Trisalonde looked from the window, and again the young lovely head passed beneath, the evening breeze catching the long locks of the maiden, and moving them in their sable beauty. The glance of the lady Ullamere followed that of Trisalonde, and then, the eyes of the mother and son meeting, it was revealed to her that a sharper pang rent Sir Trisalonde's heart than the going forth from her maternal love. And the glow which had enriched her cheek died out, leaving paleness in its stead, but there was no less love within her eyes, and no coldness came about her heart. Then the young knight turned from the shadowed window and the solemn cedar, and led his mother to a lower chamber; and the feet of the lady Ullamere trod the fresh green rushes with unfaltering firmness.

The chamber towards which their steps were bent was on the western side of the castle, and the sun had long before stolen thitherward. During the sunset hour one long bright beam had been cast aslant into the room, and had been made thrice beautiful by the thing it rested on. Surely that sunbeam had been searching for some truant love, and, losing its golden way, had chanced upon one even fairer than that it sought, and now tarried to play with its prize, to toy with its just-found treasure, to kiss it, and hold it in its lap, unwilling to part for those first bright moments.—Fie, fie ! thou slumbering maiden, is thy cheek so used to kisses that it starts not to feel the sunbeam's breath upon its downy bloom, touching it, cooing over it, growing rosy with thy cheek's rosy hue ? Wake up, wake up, and frighten it away, chiding, that it should so warily steal upon a maiden's sleep. But perchance thy waking lips would be parted with a smile, and thou wouldest acknowledge a twin love ; then,

maiden, be thou never so coy, rise and clasp thy visitant to thy breast, so warmly, so fondly, that it quit thee not again; and do thou, a bride of light, drink into thine own clear soul that bright beam of glowing sunshine—so, with thy white wedded hands, thou shalt chafe away the wrinkles which lurk on dimmer brows—so, with thy blest wedded smile, thou shalt gleam on the dark days, and chase away, with thy fleet foot, the mourning shadows of mortality.

Softly, softly, sunbeam! thy maiden-love is breathing quicker, she will wake anon! Ah! the eyes are open now! Cold maiden, is that all thy greeting to that watching wooer?—She had only lifted the white eyelids for an instant, and then giving them much too hard a rub, for they were dazzled by the evening sun, she had turned her head on her cushions again and had slept; so the sunbeam had turned pale, and had slowly crept out through the casement whereat it had entered so boldly;

yet the glow of the bright visitant had lingered among the girl's golden hair, even as the unforgotten syllables of a sweetly sung song sink into the soul after the singer is silent. Then the girl had slept on.

The deep, soft breathing of the sleeper fluttered for a moment as the lady Ullamere and Trisalonde entered; then she gave a little impatient sigh, and again awoke, but with a start of surprise, at finding that the dim twilight shade had stolen into the footprints of that vivid daylight upon which she had closed her eyes. She rose from her cushions, and, running forward, turned her cheek for her mother to kiss—its pretty pink roundness resting on the mother's lip with a caressing lingerment.

‘Sleeping, child, sleeping?’ said the lady.

‘Dreaming, mother, dreaming,’ replied the smiling girl; ‘oh, I wish thou hadst not waked me—it was not half finished. There were two knights—thou, Trisalonde, and another; but

the other was taller and goodlier than thou ; and ye rode forth together, thou on thy great brown Loki ; but the steed of the stranger was as white as milk. And, in thy helmet, for a token, was the long dark curl of a lady's hair ; but the other wore no favour, and I looked that he should seek one from me ; and I thought I held that I would give him already in my hand, but he asked not for it. So I said, "Sir Knight, I will bind thee this upon thy crest ;" but, though he stooped down his lofty head, he merely answered, "Not so, Lady ;" and I turned my face away, for I thought it shame to be denied. Then again he bent his head, and that voice, which I had never heard until when but now I slept, (and it was sweeter than thine, O Trisalonde), was close to my ear, and he said, "Only the king's sign ;" and when I looked, lo ! his hand was pointing to a deep red cross, the colour of a damask rose, that was gleaming on his shield and on his breast. And then, though I had felt so angry

but the moment before, something softer than anger crept into my spirit—something, I know not what, stole upon my senses—it was like a deep rest and yet a tumult, like cool refreshing water and yet a flame of fire; and, when I heard thy steps upon the rushes, I waked up, and so I shall never find out what that strange sweet feeling was.'

'Yes, child,' said the lady Ullamere; 'thou wilt find out one day; but now 'tis well that thou didst awake; it is better as it is. Get thee to thine embroidery—maidens should not sleep by sunlight.'

'Mother,' cried the girl, merrily, 'are mine eyes two stars, that my sharp needle will prick aight now that the sky is growing grey?—thou wouldest chide me for threads awry, for broken silk, and for a knotted web. Shall I not again fall sleeping and finish my sweet dream, mother?'

'Thy dream is partly finished for thee,

Pharapha ; thy brother Trisalonde will ride forth, and thou wilt stay behind to pray for him ;' replied the lady, calmly.

'To pray for thee, Trisalonde ? Nay,' replied the girl, 'our mother and Evangile will do that better than I ; but I will weave thee a chaplet of leaves ; I will search out my whitest pearls to 'broider thy rumpled banner ; I will go out into the courtyard and feed old Loki with wheaten cake, and he will shake his long mane over my neck, as he used to do when I was a child. But all this will be my reward for thee when thou hast returned with a battered helmet and a well-proven sword.'

'Thanks, Pharapha,' answered the knight ; 'but ere I go wilt thou be idle : wilt thou give me no good-speed.'

'When Loki passes out through the gateway,' replied the girl, 'I will go up to the highest battlement of our highest tower, and wave my scarf and hand ; and

when he has borne thee beyond my ken,
I will come down, and I will kiss *thee*,
mother; and then our mother shall say,
“The King go with Trisalonde—I have one
child left.”

As Pharapha spoke, there came gliding
through the deepened twilight the dark figure
which had passed and repassed beneath the
aged cedar; and, as that figure so entered, Sir
Trisalonde would fain have said to the lady
Ullamere,—

‘She, too, in thy heart.’

And it must have been a dead heart
that was closed against that mourning maiden.
With dove-like eyes, and all-melodious voice,
and hands stretched forth to comfort and to
soothe, she passed by tender steps within the
inner veil of human affections, giving strength
when she herself was asking succour, and
richly blessing others in the love wherewith
they clung to her. Thou dark-robed maiden,
the household of the lady Ullamere was well

dowered when thy foot passed its threshold—wherefore art thou, Evangile, tarrying with thy sable weeds in the stranger's stronghold?

There was a people whose head was high among the nations of the earth, and to that people Evangile was daughter—a people whose King reigned in equity, the ornaments of His neck being mercy and truth; but this people would none of Him—they scorned the power of His righteous sceptre—they said, ‘Not this man, but our pride; not this man, but our riches; not this man, but ambition.’ So they would not have Him bear rule over them—they would not be called by His name; so the garments of that King were rolled in blood. Then uprose Evangile, and turning her face towards the west, she steadfastly walked thitherward; and, where her foot pressed, from the parched earth sprang up a river of water, clear and bright and glistening, and so pure, that all those who walked in the same

path were cleansed from every spot, and all who bathed therein put on a new beauty ; and she whose footprints were so filled journeyed on calmly to the land of strangers, and they from aliens became one household : and, as she sat among those who had received her, Evangile called them,

‘ My mother, and my sister, and my brother.’

And when the throne of that rejected King is established before all men, before all men will Evangile proclaim of those who welcomed and loved her,—

‘ Ye are my mother, and my sister, and my brother.’

Then the aliens shall stand confessed as children ; they shall enter into the King’s palace, and go no more out.

When the words of Pharapha came to the Princess, Evangile repeated,—

‘ May the King fight for Trisalonde.’

And Pharapha’s eyes sparkled, for the

young knight, her brother, arose from his place near his mother, and, kneeling down on the green rushes at Evangile's feet, he said,—

‘ Give me for a favour one curl of thy long dark hair.’

And the Princess answered,—

‘ Bring me thy helmet.’

From its place on its lofty niche the young knight reached down the helmet, and brought it to Evangile; and she took it in her soft hands, and laid it beside her. Then she spoke to Trisalonde,—

‘ Who are thy foes?’

And he answered,—

‘ Thine, O Lady Evangile!’

‘ Thinkest thou,’ she said, putting her hand upon the casque, ‘ that the deadly arrow which they will let fly will glance harmless from these plates of iron? thinkest thou that such strength as this will turn aside their sharp lance? Knight, thou errest. The panoply

which thou wilt case thyself withal will render more fatal their blows, and cumber, too, thy progress. But the armour wherewith Evangile's knight should be equipped is different far from thine. Ride forth, then, with thy head bare before heaven, with this sign upon thy brow; and, from an armoury invincible, helmet, sword, and shield shall be bestowed upon thee, if but thou declare thyself a true soldier for Evangile's King.' And, with her finger, upon Trisalonde's brow she traced two mystic lines.

'Lady,' cried the still kneeling knight, 'thy gracious touch shall quit not my brow, and, with my good casque, I will shut it in for myself, lest the rude hand of another should sweep it thence. My fathers did buckle on this helmet when they rode forth to battle; many times they fought, and many times they won: they have proven it well, and found it a trusty friend. Our enemies, by my troth, are no mightier than theirs; so where be my fear to

meet them, if equipped as becomes the knights of my warlike house? And, were I to ride forth unarmed in the hope of receiving the harness thou speakest of, shame would be my guerdon, for my foes would cry, if I encountered them with an unclosed visor and an unsheltered front, "Ho, this braggart!" and they would mock at my banner. So I will brace on my good helmet, and I will stand before the enemy, and they shall acknowledge the King's name and thine ere I enter again the halls of my fathers. Will my lady bestow upon her servant no favour?"

'When the dark days come upon thee, O Knight,' replied Evangile—'when the token thou suest for is degraded and lost—when the panoply thou vauntest has betrayed and deceived thee—then wilt thou tarry humbly for the whole armour whereof Evangile tells, and strive earnestly if that thou mayest be girded therewith. Take thy token, brave but foolish Knight—Evangile bestows it

that thou mayest learn the vanity of thy seeking.'

So Evangile severed from her head one sable tress; and the young knight sprang to his feet.





CHAPTER IV.

Angelos the Soldier.





TWO young fair maidens rode the next day through a valley which lay at a little distance from the castle of Lady Ullamere—two maidens, fair and graceful, whose steeds seemed conscious of their burdens' worth, for they trod with measured pace, with necks arched and heads bowed: the riders were the Princess Evangile and the lady Pharapha.

Stately oak-trees rose around them—a solemn cloister for prayer and meditation, whose grandeur would have rebuked the worshipper of a false god, and have led the soul to the holy place. The wise king built a temple unto the Lord, and adorned it with plates of

gold and crusts of jewels; and so bright was it, that, when the sun shone, men's eyes could not behold it for very lustre: great blocks of marble were that temple's strength, and beautiful gates guarded it from profanation. Say, thou that walkest with an humble heart in holy places builded by the Most High, was that massive glittering pile more sacred in its consecration, than that most catholic cathedral, wherein all men may worship, whose roof is heaven, and whose organ the voice of the wind?

When man was pure, and God his friend, in the cool of the day the Lord came down among the trees of the garden, walking with his new-created. Let us at eventide go forth, and, with our hearts purified again in the holy river, cooled from their fever by the breathing of redemption, still find Him there, waiting for communion with us—longing to speak to us in His solemn voice, and to teach us that, though fallen, we have arisen again, to walk

with Him as with our Father—calling unto us, ‘Where are ye?’—saying unto us, ‘Come up hither!’

Father! Thy voice *is* tender. Thou art not always chiding; in Thy storm, in Thy calm, we can yet read Thee of infinite mercy; the hyssop which has sprinkled us was steeped in mighty love; and, when, amid Thy great works, we are face to face with Thee—when the forests crack and groan, and the earth trembles at Thy presence, when the thunder roars forth its fearful tale, and the lightning reveals Thine awful face—then Thou rememberest that we are but dust, and Thy right hand sustains us: in the hour of horror we draw near unto Thee, in the terror of the tempest we creep into Thee, and the weakness of our crying nature sinks into the strength of Thine, as a stream into the great bosom of the ocean. Then our troubled spirits enter into the promised rest, and we look up to our Father’s face, and we see thereon a

Father's smile; we hold up our feeble arms, and a hand strong and tender is stretched out, and gently it guides us; and as sons and heirs we walk onward, alive among the dead, rejoicing in our new and high estate, and praising Him, who with a great price obtained for us this freedom.

Strangely alike did the Princess Evangile and the lady Pharapha appear, as side-by-side they rode along in earnest converse—alike, and yet far different; it was just such a difference and such a likeness as exist between smiles and tears, which resemble each other so far, that they both set forth something higher than humanity, often merging into one in the extremity of emotion. Have we not sometimes seen a smile flicker for a moment on the lip of one bowed down in spirit? and have not we, you and I, wept in the hour of our heart's dearest joy—wept for very intensity of blessedness? So far they are either the expression of the other's mission.

And then again they stand apart, and space divides them. The hard grasp of sorrow seizes on the heart, and big tears fall down, wetting the bosom and the hands with salt and weary rain. Or her brighter sister rests on the features of a happy matron, with whom ecstasy has subsided into peace. Thus these two of our exalted gifts meet once, as circles may, to part again.

On the faces of these two maidens gentleness was written, on that of Evangile it grew into tender charity: the brow of both bore the stamp of purity, on that of Evangile it arose to holiness: the open look of truth was set on each, on the countenance of Evangile it was proclaimed aloud: a sweet confiding trustfulness shone in the eyes of Pharapha, in Evangile's it triumphed into faith. Of a gladsome merry blue were the eyes of the fair daughter of the castle, and her rounded cheek wore a rosier hue than tinged the cheek of Evangile. Yes, to a passing glance she was more beau-

tiful than was her strangely holy companion. Then, too, the golden sunshine of her wavy hair was deepened by the full shade of her purple drapery; whilst from the sombre black garments of the Princess no rich contrast could be borrowed; yet the lustre which lived on her brow no earthly radiance could match, no outward gloom could chase away. As when she walked beneath the cedar's shade, and when she sat in the western chamber with the lady Ullamere, a golden chalice, suspended by a chain of golden links, hung at her side, half hiding itself among the folds of her heavy robe.

'Dearest Evangile,' exclaimed the lady Pharapha, suddenly losing her interest in the theme of the Princess' discourse, 'wherefore do we ride this way? Save with thee of late, I have but seldom come hither. It is not so pretty as the stream-side, nor so sunny as the open fields. I am tired of these great oak boughs, and of these great gnarled

trunks, and my pretty Mona is tired of the great rough roots which get in the way of her little feet at every step. Good Mona, good Mona,' she added, patting the silky neck of her pet. 'Why do we ride this way to-day, Evangile ?'

'I scarcely used the guiding-rein,' replied Evangile. 'But look, Pharapha!—there is smoke coming from yonder cottage.'

'Another weariness added unto mine, sweet Lady Princess,' cried Pharapha; 'for each day that we ride hither I see the smoke, and I am tired of that too.'

'And,' added the Princess, 'I perceive a woman crouching in the doorway.'

Her companion laughed gaily.

'That woman, dear Evangile,' she said, 'must have crouched in that cottage doorway since these oaks were saplings, and I think she is as firmly rooted as they, for I have never come hither but I have seen her there, heedless, apparently, of my passing—go to, I am tired of her.'

'Nay, be not tired of one who looks as she looks,' answered the Princess gently; 'behold her again, Pharapha—see how pale and lonely she seems. I would speak even to her, and win her to speak again.'

'Then thou wilt succeed, sweet Lady,' cried Pharapha. 'Thy power would make the stones cry out to do thee a pleasure.'

As Pharapha spoke they were approaching the threshold of the mother of Angelos.

And the one whom they had watched neither started nor drew away as the two ladies rode to her side. They came so close to her, that, seeing she did not move, Evangile bent down from her saddle, and gently touched the girl's shoulder.

'Can she be blind?' she thought.

But the girl lifted her head, and, seeing a tender face hanging over her own, did not shrink, but raised her hand, and drew one of Evangile's long dark tresses through her fingers. She seemed no younger than

Pharapha, yet the Princess called her 'child.'

'Child,' she said, 'speak to me.'

But Ellice laid the forefinger of her disengaged hand upon her lip, and only looked, with a long and wistful gaze, into and beyond that fair countenance.

Then Evangile saw that she *was* blind—not blind with the full dark eyes of her outer self, but unseeing with those inner eyes whereof God is the solemn light.

She stood twisting over her finger the glossy curl which she had grasped, as though she liked its softness.

'Child,' again said the Princess, 'can you tell me your name?'—and the girl laughed. Then, altering the question, 'Can you tell me what they call you?'

'Oh,' cried the girl, as, looking up, she saw a white and glistening dove come hovering over them, 'bright! so bright!'

It was the first time she had spoken, and

the Lady, glancing upwards, perceived the bird; but instantly the girl's eyes dropped, and she lost her momentary interest as it fluttered away. The light, laughing Pharapha sat bewildered and subdued—she was awed by the strangeness of this, to her, new revelation; she felt as if, having heard that melancholy sound, *she* could never laugh again.

'Oh, Evangile!—oh, Evangile!' she cried; 'she looks like one of us, but she is not so; oh, tell me what she is.'

'She will presently be one of those!' said the Princess, lifting up her hand, and looking to the angels' place.

Pharapha bowed her head, and tears fell down on her hand; never had Evangile spoken thus of *her*—of her whose bright intelligence was as a special gift—of her whose animated beauty burned with the glow of mind; and here was one, who, although robed in a woman's form, manifested not the possession

of a woman's soul; and of her the Princess spoke words which *she* had never earned.

But Evangile knew, and Pharapha knew not, that such as the pale and passive maiden who tarried in the humble doorway would one day sit down with those on high; not then pale and passive as of yore, but endowed with the full harmony of an immortal soul, whose music should anew burst forth obedient to the touch of the Master Hand which would bid those chords awaken—chords which until then should be laid up in heavenly silence, hidden away, lest the rude voice of this jarring, troublesome world, might break upon the beauty of the divine melody of her so perfect life.

While the daughter of the castle, the fair sunny Pharapha, perceiving with satisfaction the keen clear light of the impulse of her own sensibility, as yet sometimes thought, notwithstanding the teachings of Evangile, thereby to walk unaided to the palace of the King—the

Princess knew, that, of those to whom He had been proclaimed, That King received among the shining ones, only, but most surely, such as came up through the wilderness leaning upon Him by reason of their conscious feebleness—and such as, while they tottered and stumbled in the way, still put forth their hand to feel His robe, and touching, clung to it trustingly. But Evangile *also* knew, that ones like unto this unseeing maiden, the King, wrapping around them His dyed garments, tenderly lifted up, and carried in His bosom.

Then Evangile turned again to the girl, and she said, ‘Albeit thou art silent now, and nameless, thou, child, shalt speak a glorious Name anon.’

‘The name of the maiden is Ellice,’ said a deep voice at the lady’s side.

‘And thine?’ asked the Princess.

‘Angelos.’

The young man was standing there in his woodman’s dress, with his heavy hatchet in his

hand, and on his shoulder he bore the wood which he had been cleaving ; the sun had burnt his brow, the wind had roughened it ; his browned hands and his tough leathern dress spoke of toil.

Evangile looked steadfastly upon him, and presently she asked, ‘Where hast thou wrought, Angelos ?’

So Angelos raised his hatchet, and pointed with it far away down the long vista of trees, and past Pharapha’s battlemented home, and he said,—

‘There I have laboured to-day ; there, where the sun goes down.’

Then the Princess asked him, ‘Wouldest thou labour where it rises ? wouldest thou leave the declining sun, and turn to the morning star ? The King of the East is waiting for soldiers, and calls for thee, Angelos, to join His ranks ; wilt thou with goodwill do battle for Him ? wilt thou lay down that rude instrument of thine, and take the bright sword instead ?

wilt thou ease thy shoulder of its burden, and take another, a lighter, upon it ?'

'Lady,' answered Angelos, 'already in vision have I received a sword, and a call to the service of a perfect Leader; but when, awaking, I sought my armour, lo ! my hand grasped this hatchet, and but some just-opped wood was strewn around me !'

'Wilt thou put on the whole armour which Evangile will give thee,' said the Princess, 'and, strengthened with all might according to His glorious power, wilt thou go forth and fight for Evangile's King, who will lead thee on to conquest ?'

And Angelos replied, 'I will go.'

Pharapha leaned down from her saddle towards Angelos, and, looking at Ellice, who had remained where first she stood beside Evangile, holding in her white un-labour-worn hands the chalice which ever depended from the girdle of the Princess; 'Is she,' said Pharapha, 'is she thy sister ?'

‘Ay, Lady,’ replied the young man.

‘And dost thou live in this cottage?’

Again he answered, ‘Ay, Lady,’ adding,
‘My mother, and Ellice my sister, and I, dwell
here together.’

‘And whence comes their store and thine?’
asked Pharapha.

‘We eat of the bread which these hands
win,’ replied the young man.

— Now, while Angelos had been speaking with the Princess, the lady Pharapha had steadfastly regarded him, and ever and again the lashes had drooped over her bright eyes, and the red colour had wavered up to her brow; but no, with all her thinking, she could not think of what her thinking made her think; she could not tell her memory of what her memory told her.—

‘How! mother and sister?’ Pharapha exclaimed; ‘and thou wilt leave them here alone?’

‘Lady,’ replied the erewhile woodman, ‘I

go to fight for the King ; the King will fight for them.'

Then Pharapha turned away her head, for the words of the young man's answer told her whose was the form, and face, and voice by which she had been strangely haunted, and recalled to her mind the reply which in her sleep she had received,—'Only the King's sign.' This Angelos it was, then, who had rejected her silken favour ! 'But,' she said in her heart, 'I will bind it yet upon his helmet ; though first he shall full lowly crave it for a token ; not as in my foolish dream shall Pharapha be scorned.' But, notwithstanding her proud resolve, her hand trembled as it held her bridle rein, for she had many times thought of her sleep of the day before ; and she bowed her head low down over Mona's neck, lest Evangile should observe the warm glow upon her cheek.

The Princess had listened earnestly for the answer Angelos would make to the lady Pharapha's questions, so earnestly that Ellice had

remained quite unnoticed the while; but now she was constrained to turn, for the girl had raised the golden chalice which hung at Evangile's side to her mouth, and was holding it there eagerly, as if she were draining it of some precious drops. Thus the linked golden chain was long drawn out, and the Princess felt its zone tightening about her waist. Ellice grasped the cup so firmly, that the action told of one much athirst; her lips clung to the golden brim, as though a long feverish drought had consumed her with its agony.

And Evangile said, 'Surely there is wine for thee!'

Then Ellice let fall the chalice, and, for a moment, there shone in her full dark eyes, one ray of light, as, lifting them, she looked up into heaven.

And Pharapha, than whose never throbbed a kindlier heart, and who had raised her flushed face from Mona's neck, now cried,—

'Oh! let the pale child come home to us, and thy mother too, Angelos. Mine will care for both.'

Then Evangile turned to the young man, and she spoke solemnly, saying, 'Angelos, thou didst say well; fights not the King already in thy behalf?'

'May the King fight for thee,' said Angelos, looking on the face of Pharapha; but to Evangile he spoke not, but bowed himself down and kissed the hem of her sable garment.

So it was but for a little while longer that the old oak-trees beheld the writhing smoke issue from that forest cottage, and but for a little while longer that they cast their protecting shade over a figure crouching at the doorway.

And maybe that even a stronger feeling than the love which is called charity, now causes the mother of Angelos and the pale Ellice to be special charges of the lady Pharapha; but the merry maiden has grown

graver now than she was wont to be; her mother thinks it is from so often looking upon the weary, because ever-constant smile, or into the large far-gazing eyes of their heaven-guarded guest. But Evangile knows that the day when Pharapha ascended to the highest tower of the castle, and thence watched Sir Trisalonde and another ride forth, was the time at which had been wrought the change; for tears had rolled down the girl's fair cheeks, and had stained the pale gold curls of her hair, as the stately head of that stately house, and that other and newly-accoutréed knight, had paced out through the gateway.

Pharapha! sunny Pharapha! whence came the fleecy cloud that is now lingering on thy brow? The vivid hue is vanished from thy cheek, and thy laughter is hushed. Sad was the kiss that thou gavest the lady Ullamere, when brown Loki and a certain white steed turned the hillside towards the eastern horizon.

Hast thou slept again and finished the dream which thy mother's entrance broke off? hast thou found out the secret which was dark to thee then? hast thou read now the riddle which was then closed to thy guessing? Why, sure, the words of thy mother were right, for truly the reading is not to thy joy.

Poor child! poor maiden! thine was a bright heart ere now.

Would that the sunbeam had not so soon crept out from the western chamber!

Sometimes the Princess Evangile, while she uttered her comfortable words, would put her arms about the girl, and seek to soothe her with their tender fold; and Pharapha, with her head bowed on her counsellor's neck, would cling fondly to her; or, in wilful response to the same tender embrace, would slip from her grasp and flee away to her own chamber, and there shut herself in with her own grave face; and Evangile would look tenderly after the maiden, and say within herself,—

‘I would, that, not almost, but altogether
thou shouldest lean on me ; child, I would give
thee rest.’

And thy rest, O Evangile ! is sweet.





CHAPTER V.

Innocens.





TILL for many days towards the east
Sir Trisalonde rode; still by his side,
or often in advance, rode Angelos.

Sir Trisalonde, when he had passed forth from his father's halls, had turned, and had looked up at the grave, old, ivy-clothed towers; and from the highest battlement he had seen the waving of a white scarf. Another was by thy side, fair knight—the token was not all for thee.

But Angelos had ridden straight on, looking not back. Pharapha! Pharapha! wherefore were those tears?—he heard not the voice of thy weeping. Pharapha! Pharapha! vain was thy waving, for Angelos heeded it not.

Brown Loki paced with a martial step, as

he carried his master onward; and his master bore his helmet high, and the rich dark curl fell soft and bright, and shone in the beams of the early day.

Sir Angelos wore no favour.

Sir Angelos rode with a careful rein, and with his face steadfastly turned eastward, for he must go on—he must needs keep his eyes fixed on the eastern horizon, whence shone the pure light of morning, and unto that light he would attain. The Princess Evangile had pointed to him the way, and, albeit Sir Trisalonde bore her outward and visible sign, yet deep down in the secret heart of his brother-in-arms was the inward and unseen power of her will yet speaking to him.

Sir Trisalonde shook his rein, and Loki gave a joyous bound.

‘Angelos, Angelos,’ cried the young knight, ‘my heart is throbbing with joy, my hand is trembling for my lance. Now will our names be heard with envy among men, and ladies’

lips will not disdain to speak and sing of Angelos and of Trisalonde. The air is bringing us a promise of fame, and the whole world of chivalry will praise our deeds.'

'Sir Knight,' replied the other, 'what shall it profit a man if he gain the praise of the whole world, gaining it for the sake of praise alone?—thereby he shall lose that he can find not again.'

'Thou art talking a fable, brave Angelos,' cried Sir Trisalonde—'thou art talking a fable. What should we seek but honour? what should we need but praise? for what should we strive but glory?'

Angelos laid his hand on the deep red cross upon his breast, and he looked up to heaven, and answered,—

'Honour, Praise, and Glory!'

And a smile stole over his face, and then he bowed his head.

Sir Trisalonde at first looked at him amazed; and then, thinking that in truth they

were of one mind in their seeking, he exclaimed,—

‘Yes, yes, my brother, this is our watch-word, this our cry ; this is the food which we will eat, this is the wine which we will drink ; and as for aught else, we will think not of it, but bravely we will live, as good knights and loyal should.’

And Angelos said, ‘Our fathers did eat of such bread, and drink of such wine, and they are dead : but there is a brook in the way whereof we must drink ; and, if we can claim it, a rest remaineth for us.’

Then Trisalonde grew angry, and he cried, —the hot anger flaming forth from his eyes the while, like the flashes of a furious tempest,—

‘Thou faint-hearted woodman’s son ! how darest thou ride with one of noble blood, if thou carest not for renown ? Sure thy belt must gall thy carrion body, and thy new spurs must fret thy unused heel, if thou talkest of rest ere the battle begin !’

But Angelos turned towards him, and he said,—

‘Has not the battle already begun?’

And the generous-hearted Trisalonde was touched by the lofty, gentle face, and it grieved his knightly soul that he had spoken so roughly, for he knew that Angelos was brave; so, holding forth his hand, he said,—

‘Brother Angelos, grasp my hand, and pardon thou my words. Thou art, I know full well, as good and brave a knight as I: though that is but scanty praise after such a discourteous speech as mine.’

Then the two knights leaned each from his saddle, and grasped one another’s hands.

And, as they rode, Sir Trisalonde soon grew gay again, and he sang a knightly song, a lay of warlike feats and ladies’ love.

But Sir Angelos thought of the day, when, tired with toil, his limbs had been so suddenly refreshed, and cased in invincible armour

of proof; yet, strange though his life now was to him, it seemed not as a dream from which he might soon awaken—not as a legend which he might soon be forgetting, as men forget a tale that has been told: but it appeared as though from his earliest days he had been buried in deep sleep, and had but just aroused from a lifelong lethargy—had but just opened his heavy eyes to look upon the blessed sunlight, which, though shining uncurtained all around him from his very infancy, and ever gleaming by the threshold of his soul, had been, until of late, denied entrance upon his drowsy brain. No! he could not have been dreaming? The remembrance of his mother and sister whom he had left forbad the thought, for the old days were yet clear in his memory;—days when he had been called as in the time of his childhood, Anglos, a sound belonging to the unlighted past, but as yet unforgotten;—ay, and that *new* name whereby he should be henceforward known,

though it had come to him in mystery, was it not in reality still resounding in his ears? and, too, that newly-given life, was he not, as one born again, in reality commencing to lead it? No! he could not have been dreaming.

So, albeit his unlettered tongue was not able to expound the tale whereof prophets and kings had been unwillingly ignorant, yet, deep in the ground of his heart was the sweet mystery hidden, and on it there he now pondered with love.

What wonder was it, then, that, absorbed in these higher thoughts, he should ride on in silence, heedless of the voice of his companion as he so merrily sang? Trisalonde wandered from song to song, and maidens' beauty and deeds of arms were ever still the burden. But presently, with his hand upraised, he exclaimed,—

‘Ho, Angelos! why ride we so fast? Look aside on yonder hill, and tell me what thou dost see.’

'I see,' answered Angelos, his eyes following the direction of the young knight's hand, 'I see a tent.'

'Ay, Angelos,' cried the other, 'a tent, true enough; any miserable goatherd's habitation is, perhaps, a tent. But what an one is that which we approach! for beauty of shape, with yon gilded orb crowning its rounded summit, it might be the pavilion of a journeying king, who journeys to meet a royal bride; and for costly richness of sweeping drapery, with its graceful tracings of golden network round about, it might be for awhile an emperor's abode. Turn thy steed thitherward, my Angelos; I go to challenge an entrance, and together we will lift those curtains of drooping purple.'

'Hold, Sir Trisalonde!' cried Angelos; 'methinks that glittering pavilion is none wherein we may enter. The banner which flaunts thereon bears not the device of our King, and the music which is borne thence

to my ears sounds not as one of the songs of His kingdom.'

'Nay, I will go thither,' answered the young knight, impatiently; 'so, if thou art fearful, I must ride alone. Angelos, Angelos, come with me. Maybe we shall find there some who will fight with us for our King and His Evangile—some who will ride with us on our side.'

'A cry! a cry!' exclaimed Sir Angelos; and, with no other answer, he started forward.

'A cry! a cry!' echoed Sir Trisalonde; and Loki followed the white steed closely; but the white steed was first. Down from the saddle sprang Sir Angelos, and as he lifted the silken curtains, Sir Trisalonde could see from his place in the rear the inner secrets of that doleful chamber.

And those curtains had screened—what had they screened?

They had screened death; they had screened anguish; and with that death and anguish they

had screened a young, fresh child's beauty—beauty which, amid the blotting of tears, showed its white purity only the more clearly.

The child was cowering beside a couch, whereon lay a woman, whose head had fallen back, and whose hands caressed not that only weeping watcher, but whose fingers and white, round, tapering arms were still; and on those rigid arms there was a strange, deep, blue mark—a broad line—just above the slender wrists. A strange mark, that, to trace on a woman's arm.

For a moment, when the curtain was raised, the sunshine had rushed joyously into the chamber, but had seemed as if suddenly chilled and out of place; and, as the drapery fell again, had been quickly swallowed up by the gloom which prevailed. For now the only light within that portion of the pavilion was shed by a small silver lamp which hung above the bed—of daylight there could enter none; and the lamp's pale ray rested on that

yet paler face, and the face looked luminous in its wondrous pallor: surely all the light in that dim chamber proceeded from that unmoving face! And the rays which stole thence seemed to centre and rest on the hair of that crouching child.

The armed knights, who had entered, stood still, listening for the breathing of the two whom they saw; but instead thereof, the silence was broken by a sob—a sob as deep as anguish had ever wrung from one to whom a long life had taught acquaintance with grief; and it was doubly woeful, coming as it did from that almost baby-frame. Soon the child half raised herself up, and looked on the woman's face; and, with her dimpled hand, she stroked the woman's cheek; then she started, and gave a shrill cry, like that which the knights had before heard her utter; and, as she fell forward on the bed, two heavy chains slipped from her lap, and rang out with a knell-like clang as they struck the ground.

Then Sir Angelos stepped from among the folds of the curtain, where he had remained until now, and, crossing the space between himself and the couch, knelt down beside the child—knelt down with his armour on ; and gently, and like a mother, he gathered the little stricken one to himself in his big strong arms. The child, with neither start nor cry, suffered herself to be drawn within them ; resting her tired head against his breast, just where he had lain it ; and her cheek and temple touched the deep red cross which the young knight wore thereon. And, as the child's tears fell fast on the crimson sign, it seemed as though by it they were received and welcomed, for no trace of them remained. And then the tumult of those cruel sobs ceased, and the little one grew still upon that strange and holy pillow.

That still calmness, which sometimes creeps over the grief of a child, is very woeful to behold, when gentleness and caresses have won

it into a quietness which is not slumber, and when the gray hue of tired nature has stolen over the sweet freshness of the tender face ; a still calmness which speaks aloud of the heavy hand which has been laid on the troubled heart. Surely, in the gravity of that transient lull, a life, apart from its ordinary life, a world, separate from its daily world, are rising up before the weary brain. Ay, separate and apart, even as at such a time the very outlines of the face seem altered from their wonted semblance. And now, as that young frail child nestled in the strong man's arms, as her rounded cheek lay upon the crimson cross, what changes the mother's eye could have traced since the hour when last her lips pressed those tender eyelids, since last she kissed that balmy mouth ! After a few moments of stillness the head turned from its resting-place, and the little one seemed to grow uneasy ; the lips quivered and trembled, the quiet breathing was broken into sobs.

And Sir Angelos was much distressed, for how might he soothe that desolate one? He glanced round for his companion knight, but perceived that he had departed. Then he bent down his face over hers, only hoping that she might sleep; but the child's eyes opened, and looked straight up into his; then, turning her head towards the couch, she stretched out her arms, uttered a sharp ringing cry, and struggled to be free. So the knight, fearing that the tender frame would be galled by his too closely clasping her, set her gently down on a silken cushion which lay upon the ground; but the child rose, and ran to the bed. Her head was scarcely more than level with the coverlet, yet, by clinging to it with her rosy hands, she could just see all of the face of the motionless one; and, so raising herself, she cried out in her lisping speech, 'My mother!—oh, mother, lift me up!—oh, my mother, let me lie by thee!'

Then the strange silence of her until now

ever-answering mother frightened her yet again, and she whispered like one who in the dark is afraid of his own voice,—

‘Mother, wake up ! wake up, mother !’

Then, with another cry, she turned to Sir Angelos, and said,—

‘Oh ! wake my mother for her Innocens.’

And Sir Angelos knelt again by the couch, saying to her,—

‘Thy mother is awake already, my little one ; did thy mother love her little child ?’

For a moment the young troubled face looked bewildered ; then, as if collecting her remembrance, she answered,—

‘My mother takes me in her arms, and weeps while she kisses me, and then she says, “Oh ! Innocens, with thee on my bosom my fetters are welcome to me.” Then, perhaps, I fall asleep, and, when I waken, I am still in her arms ; and then my mother will say, “Innocens, thou offspring of my tears, thou daughter of my tribulation, speak with thy

sweet voice, that I may hear, and grow like unto thee." And then I know not an answer—I only say, "I am thy Innocens."

And the child paused, as if her mind were seeking for somewhat that was fast fading away from her remembrance; then she added in a doubtful voice,—

"And my mother says, "If I should quit thee, thou wouldest not tarry here; when—when I—when I am—" Oh! I forget her word. Mother dear, what is it that you often tell me?"

Then said Angelos, gathering up in his hands the shackles, which, when he had first entered, had fallen down from the child's lap, and speaking quickly, lest she might fall weeping again,—

"Tell me, thou pure Innocens—what are these?"

"Oh!" cried Innocens, glancing at them, "are they quite broken? I am so glad. My mother always wore them on her wrist, and

they hurt her so ; it was just as she grew very still that I heard them snap. I often took them in my hand, and held them up, that they should not be so very painful ; and though I am young and tender, I could lift them quite well, and my mother used to say that when I got fast hold of them, and grasped them firmly with my two hands, it made them light and easy, though they were still bound about her limbs. I think it was that sharp dreadful iron that made her weep so much, for her arms are very soft, and there is a great dark line where it hurt her. See, my mother is sleeping sweetly now ! She never slept without sobbing before, unless my hand was on the chain. Oh, I am so glad that the great cruel links are quite broken off.'

'They are broken for ever,' said Angelos. 'See, Innocens,' he added, 'this helmet I wear to save me in the day of battle, for to fight is mine ; and these chains, which with thy aid she so patiently bore, thy mother wore to her perfecting, for to suffer and endure was hers.'

Child, as those chains snapped asunder, thy mother went forth at large. Awhile ago her feet were made fast in the stocks, but now she walks in our King's garden ; her bonds are loosed ; she hath passed from captivity and pain to the freedom in which thou, Innocens, art always free.'

'Then will I sing,' said Innocens, 'while my mother sleeps. Lift me up in thine arms, O Knight, to my mother's pillow.'

So Sir Angelos tenderly raised the fair child, and placed her on the couch : then Innocens, her countenance radiant with heaven's purity, bent over the clay which looked so beautiful in that peaceful first hour after life, for all trace of tribulation had passed from the face ; and, with her hand yet lingering on the blood-red cross which lay on the knight's breast, she spoke strange words for a little child to breathe. She spoke thus :—'Mother ! but for thee, I should not be where I am. Mother ! but for me, thou couldest not be where thou art.'

And while Sir Angelos watched she followed her mother.

Then Sir Angelos settled his shield upon his shoulder, and took his sword in his hand, and so he kneeled down. And he cried out, 'How long will it be ere I attain unto Innocency ?'





CHAPTER VI.



Ad Astra.





HOW pretty it is when a deep green glade is as smooth as a velvet robe, of surface more soft than loom can weave, and of colour more bright than artist can mix! How pretty it is when such a glade is scattered with starry flowers, that lie as still among the dewy grass as if they only sought to coax the butterflies to rest; and when over the ferns and over the moss the delicate may and the pink dog-rose hold out their fanning arms, that the strength of the sun should not smite them at noon, and that strangers' eyes should not gaze on their beauty!

In just such a glade, but at evening-tide,
Queen Alcyone now doth hold her court.

Why, flowers, ye were erewhile at rest, and wooing even butterflies to stillness ! What means this flutter on your bosom ? are ye learning of men to sigh ? But then ye would grow dimmer, and now ye are more vivid in your loveliness.—Your tremulous wavering yet goes on, and your colour changes into smiles, and your perfume melts into music, and your whole fair flower-forms perfect into maidens—sure brighter bloom of beauty than blossoms ever bore—fairer fruit than ever flowers fashioned forth before !

And the deep green glade is sparkling now with jewels bright as stars ; jewels that are not all alike, but glitter with a varied semblance. As the ruby and the diamond may blaze together on a queen's neck, each after its kind gleaming with priceless light, but each differing in lustre and in hue ; so these jewels that decked the deep green glade shone in diverse but mingled beauty ; for some of them were dewdrops, and some of them were maidens.

And the brightest jewel, the purest gem, was the peerless Queen Alcyone: the fireflies, with their ever fitful glow, were circling about her head, the constant star was burning on her brow; and before her, on the grass, knelt a form almost like her own for beauty, though less glistening with in-living light.

‘Bow down thy head, sweet Maia,’ said the Queen; ‘bow down thy head, my favourite.’

So Maia lowered her head until her forehead, adorned likewise with a star, almost touched Alcyone’s knee; then the Queen stooped over her, and spoke,—

‘Mortal’s friend, in loving with a sister’s love the sorrowful, thou art as a sister unto Alcyone.’

‘My Queen,’ said Maia, lifting her radiant face, ‘call me thy servant, and I am well rewarded.’

‘Nay, my sister,’ cried the Queen, ‘in our perfect band of seven I would that none should serve the other; my vassals are numberless

legions bright; my kingdom is spread through space: but ye, who encircle my central throne, are freed by my love from thrall. Bound as we are by an invisible bond, nor man nor we can trace the link which holds us; perfect were we each if sundered, more perfect are we being united; for therein the measure of our beauty is filled up, the bowl of our radiance is high to the brim, lighting us that each may look upon the other, and even flowing over, that mortals may look up and say, "See, see the sisters of Alcyone!"'

Then the Queen stretched forth her pearly hands, and from them fell, even like dew from a shaken blossom, a long waving chain of brilliancy; so clear that the air marvelled at its stability, so bright that the eyes of Queen Alcyone, which were reflected thereby, gave to it no additional lustre. It was passing strange that those liquid gems endured, that they did not melt away even as the snow flies when the shadows grow shorter.

'Take, Sister Maia,' cried the Queen, 'take and wear upon thy neck this chain of immortal youth. As thy mantling cheek is glowing now with the fresh bloom of a maiden's beauty; as thy sparkling eyes are beaming now with the sweet love-light of purity; as thy parting lips are breathing now with rich red ruby life dwelling on them: so, with this chain about thy neck, thy lips, thine eyes, thy cheek, shall breathe, and beam, and glow on for ever—ay, for ever! Look up, sweet Maia, again, and smile on thy Queen, who has given thee of her love this gift of price.'

So Maia lifted up her face and looked upon the Queen; but, with the smiling beauty of her eyes, tears were warring not to fall, her mouth quivering the while. The Queen leaned forward and earnestly regarded her.

'Child, friend, sister,' said Alcyone, softly, 'mortal drops are in thine eyes, a mortal sigh is on thy lip—what stranger guests are these that dull thy brightness? Hast thou lingered

too long with the children of men? for sorrow springs from the stain of their sin. I would not see the chain of life which is resting on thy bosom drop sorrowfully apart and vanish into dew.'

'Ah, Lady Queen,' replied the kneeling maiden, throwing back her veiling hair, 'maybe I have tarried too long with them. I have seen one with dimmed eye and pallid face weary for the boon of sleep, and I have stood and watched it come, fanning with my soft wings the while. I have seen the eye with too burning a light, and the cheek whose redness has been a flame; and he, too, has longed for sleep, while again, until that sleep stole in, I have lingered, unseen of those who stood around, though sometimes the one I have watched over has murmured somewhat of angels; and then, when the sleep had come, I have sped away, as that one, with no solitary wing, has launched on the resounding air. So, Queen, if their sleep is

so sweet to them, what is thy gift but unresting wakefulness? Oh, Queen, take back thy chain, and give me mortal sleep.'

'Maia,' asked the Queen, 'wariest thou of well-doing? Look on the beauteous planet which at evening or at morning shines—thinkest thou that she would crave to hang for ever in heaven a silver crescent, or for ever in her fuller orb to gleam on man at her brighter radiance?—then wouldest thou, who, whether in the twilight hour or mid the deep darkness of night art equal in thy lustre, wouldest thou rest, wouldest thou sleep? Wear thou thy chain, sweet sister, and steal not sleep and tears from mortals.'

So Maia, smiling, but with the dew yet in her eyes, replied, 'Heaven gave tears unto men, and perhaps men lent them unto me.' And then, clasping her hands over the liquid chain which hung about her neck, she cried, 'Yes, yes, my Queen, let me keep thy gift; thou teachest well, what have I to do with

mortals' sleep?—ever waking, our light shall lighten their gloom, and, looking upwards, they shall exclaim, "See, see the subjects of Alcyone!"'

And Maia rose, and, as she passed round the Queen's throne, there fell from her lucid form a soft ray of lambent light.

Then, unbidden, Merope started up, and knelt before the Queen where the grass was still bright from Maia's touch.

'Sweet Queen!' she cried; but no answer came. 'Sweet Queen!' she said again; but yet there was silence. Then the maiden laid her cheek upon the knee of her mistress, and looked up into her eyes; and, as she looked, she laughed; and as she laughed, Alcyone glanced down and smiled.

'Wilful child,' she said, 'I summoned thee not.'

'Is Merope wilful?' asked the maiden; 'then stroke her face with thy royal fingers, and make her good again. Is Merope wilful?

—it is nice to be wilful, sweet Queen, for then the Queen shakes her head until the fireflies are frightened ; and all the time she smiles and thinks, “I love the wilful child.” Sweet Queen, give me a chain like that of the solemn Maia. Do, sweet Queen ; for I would not have my hair grow white for all the love of all the dingy mortals on this earthy little earth.’

Granting no answer to her saucy prayer, Alcyone asked,—

‘ Whither have those truant wings carried thee of late ? Hast thou grown a better child, hast thou ceased from playing at evil ?’

And Merope lifted her cheek from the Queen’s knee, and said, with demure countenance,—

‘ Oh, Queen ! I have had rare sport ! I stole in at an open lattice, and, as I entered, I met a sunbeam returning thence ; and within the chamber there was a maiden sleeping, albeit the thrushes were singing without ; she was pretty enough for a human

thing, and, as she lay there on her cushions, I thought her worth breathing on. So I breathed on her once, and yet twice again, and the third time her face changed; and it grew bright, then eager, then indignant, and then so soft and dewy that I think her heart was speaking to her: then, all too soon, I was frightened away, for two great wingless things came in, crunching the rushes with their heavy steps. But I do not think the maiden will forget my visit, for I heard her say, as her mother drew near, "Oh, I wish you had not wakened me!"'

'Thou mischievous sprite, wilt thou never grow wise?' said the Queen; 'wilt thou for ever bring sorrow rather than peace on those pathways crossed by thy wilful will?'

'Sweet Queen,' answered Merope, 'the fair maiden whom I visited wept not, but rather smiled: was it not good of me to make her smile?'

'Ay, child,' replied Alcyone; 'but such

smiles are sure to bring tears in their train.
Go to that maiden now, and judge if her face
is as peaceful as it was wont to be.'

'Oh, yes, dear Lady Queen,' cried the rosy nymph, 'I will visit her again; think not that I will forsake her yet; those on whom Merope breathes become her special charge. And then, thou *A*ether Majesty, I hovered round about, and listened to the talk of those who had entered the chamber; and a brave young knight was speaking of war, and one who wore sable garments was bidding him depart. And I whispered to him of renown, and the young man panted for the strife. Then the dark-robed lady spoke of the cause for which he should fight, and I whispered in his ear of fame; and the grave maiden bade him lay aside his warrior attire, and trust in the strength and the armour to be bestowed by some King of whom she spake, but I charged him to trust in his own. So he answered, "Our foes are strong, and

my armour is good." And he was wise, and would not ride forth unarmed to the battle. And lo, Lady Queen, the triumph was mine; save for me, the touch on his brow of the finger of that solemn one would have wiled him where she would.'

'Go on with thy story, maiden,' said the Queen, when the voice had ceased for an instant; 'thou hast not much to triumph in, thou vain and foolish child!'

'Must I go on, my Queen?' she asked; 'nay, now I do not care to talk, for my next voyage brought me defeat; and Merope, thinking of it, could beat her wings for rage, and, were it not so pretty, she would tear her hair for shame.'

'Then for a penance speak, my maiden,' said Alcyone.

So Merope pouted, and drooped her head, and turned it from side to side; and then, unwillingly, she began her story:—

'I saw two knights ride forth from a castle

gateway, and one was mine, was mine—for his banner was spread forth proudly to the wind ; and his eyes, for his visor was up, were glowing with fiery ardour. Floating from his bright helmet was the long dark curl of a lady's hair, while the device blazoned on his shield was a man's hand plucking down the sun. With him I was satisfied. So I fluttered me to his companion, and my mouth was quite close to his ear to whisper somewhat of that sweet ambition, the thought of which so warmed and filled his fellow, when I fell back and almost lost my balance on his shoulder ; and, O Queen ! it was just one glimpse of that young knight's face which startled me so much. I soon recovered myself, however, and then, for I was no bigger than a mote in a sunbeam, I perched on the uppermost hair of the ear of his white horse, that I might look at that knight a little longer. Oh, Queen ! I felt quite grave when I gazed at that face ; it was so calm, and firm, and pure, that my tongue

had no power to speak of vanity; it was so lofty, and steadfast, and holy, that I could not speak of pride. I think that I must have eaten nightshade for my breakfast, for again I nearly fell, and only saved myself by catching to the wing of a gnat which had settled near me, and that kept me upright in my place. The knight wore an helmet, sweet Queen, that had an invincible look, but no favour floated thence; a bright shield was on his shoulder, and thereon, as on his breast, I saw a deep dark cross, the colour of a damask rose, and on the shield it seemed to burn. Wherefore that strange device, O Queen? we wear not such upon our robes.'

But the Queen, hearing Merope's question, lowered her gem-crowned sceptre, and the white star upon her forehead beamed with added light,'as she answered in a tremulous voice,—

'Hush! hush, my maiden! that symbol is a mystery—the symbol of a Star brighter than mine—brighter than mortals' sun—so bright

that we will bow our heads in speaking of it.
Hush! hush, my maiden! thou hast no power
over that cross-guarded knight.'

Again Merope frowned and pouted; but,
soon smiling, and kissing the Queen's lowered
wand, she cried,—

' Give me a chain, sweet Queen; give me a
chain like that which Maia wears.'

' Nay, child,' answered Alcyone, ' how canst
thou sue for such a gift? it is on the loving
breast and for loving deeds that such shall be
bestowed. Where is the love that thou hast
loved withal? whose the brow that thou hast
smoothed? Immortal youth may not be thine
for thee to trifle with, as with a toy. Give
me thy hand; I will fit to thy finger a ring
of remembrance, that maybe shall make my
merry child more wise.'

So Merope held up her fair right hand, and
Queen Alcyone placed thereon a ring, wherein
was set one jewel, and that jewel was a
mortal's tear.

But Merope turned her hand about disconsolately, and said, ‘Thy gift is not very bright, my Queen; it is not very pretty.’

‘It does not sparkle, child,’ replied the Queen, ‘but in its dim purity there is cleansing power—power whereby dark lives may be illumined, and whereby thou thyself perchance may learn a beauty whereof now thou canst not guess—ay, and so become beautiful thyself.’

Like a ruffled bird Merope stroked her wings, like a sceptic she shook her head, like a vain maiden she stooped down to gain a maiden’s answer from a maiden’s counsellor; and the mirror she consulted was a dewdrop hanging to the lip of a daisy. Whilst the dewdrop gave its answer, the Queen’s wand waved towards Celæno’s place.

Then Celæno rose and bowed before the Æther Majesty. And said the Queen, ‘Daughter of our Starry Home, where have thy footsteps pressed? where has thy voice echoed?

where have thy wings glistened since the day
when the little weeping child folded her hands
together at thy gentle teaching ?'

And Celæno answered ; ' I saw a cloud, and I passed upward,—upward,—on,—and beyond that cloud ; and when at length I had risen to the whiteness of light, and had looked that some should roll back a wondrous portal that barred my way, I heard a voice, and it spake and said, " Hold ! art thou purged from sin ?" And I answered, " What word is that ?" — for I knew it not, my Queen. Then the voice answered solemnly, " Through much tribulation." So I wondered yet more. Then again the voice spake, " Canst thou plead that One has suffered for thee ?" but I said, " Wherefore should one suffer for me ? Nay, nay, I would not have it so ; it would make my bright life dark and sorrowful." Then the voice said, " Without atonement for sin there is no entrance given." Then I turned away, and I think that my face grew pale ; and I

wished that my life were less coldly pure, and I wished that I were in such a strait that I should need one to pluck me thence; for then, my Queen, I might pass those glittering doors. But thou,—thou, Queen Alcyone, canst not thou, with thy bright star-power, open for us those gates? Oh, Queen, let us linger no longer; guide us away to those bright white doors. Let us thitherward turn our everlasting steps, and then float on at rest.'

But Alcyone lowered again her sceptre, and said, 'To such as ye and I are those pearly portals barred. Enough for us that we may join with those who minister to them that shall obtain admission. Thou dost remember, Celæno, the weeping child upon the sandy plain; that child, as then she knelt with folded hands, was a being higher than we; higher in that she was so low, and in that Another, a greater, came and raised her, and lifted her up, and shall bear her tenderly in His arms, until, with oftentimes folded hands,

and oftentimes kneeling knees, she enters upon the glory within those happy doors.'

Maia had listened with an earnest aspect while Celæno spoke, as if she too had beheld those marvellous, bright, impenetrable gates; and as if she too had yearned for an entrance. But, on hearing the Queen's words, her fair head drooped, and she breathed a mournful sigh.

But Merope, who had lain herself at the Queen's footstool, now turned her face to Celæno, and laughed a perfect peal of elfin bells.

'Ha! ha! ha! ha!' she cried. 'Look, sister Celæno! look!—and she held up her hand—'were I as peevish as thou, I should chafe at our naughty Queen for bestowing upon me only this sad little ring, instead of a long beautiful chain like that which Maia wears; but see, I only lay me down here in the centre of us all and laugh. And thou—albeit we are so æther-like that we can

transport ourselves whithersoever else we will — thou art wearying because thou hast seen a pretty door and may not go in thereat. Fie, thou cross maiden! While I have flowers for my couch, and balmy breezes for my car, and many foolish mortals for my toys, I, Merope, am well content.'

Then, with her witching face held upwards to the Queen, she whispered: 'I go, my Lady, to find out how my sleepy maiden fares. I heard her say to those who came, "Oh! I wish you had not waked me!" Grieve not, thou wakened damsel, thy dream is coming back to thee as fast as Merope can fly. But no—not yet; I will first stay to see if thou, Celæno, or our sisters Taygeta, Asterope, or Electra, will get a chain or ring. Taygeta,' she continued, 'thou didst hear the tale of my good deeds; whom hast thou tormented? Tell us quickly, sister. I would fain learn a pleasant teasing trick of thee, for my wit is at best but dull and slow. Yet I

would not keep my dreamy maiden waiting over long.'

'Speak, sister,' said the Queen; 'whom hast thou comforted, sweet sister?'

Then spoke Taygeta softly: 'As a snowy dove I drooped over a pale, un-spirit-lighted maiden; and I think that my silvery bosom revealed to her somewhat of heaven; for, looking up, she spoke and smiled. But it was only the heavy texture of her mortal vestment that I beheld. Oh, Queen! my wings are powerless to bear me to within the place where her spirit waits. Fain would I behold that pure, un-earth-trammelled soul, where it yet rests in the hollow of the Great All-Father's Hand; but I cannot gain the Rainbow of Eternity on these pinions weighted with the atmosphere of earth.'

Then the Queen drew from her folded wing a long and glistening petal, and, giving it to Taygeta, she said,—

'That Rainbow girds about a Throne which

thou canst not approach. Toil still, sister, on thy gracious wings, to swell the blessed throng of those who stand in its Holy Light.'

And now a rustling murmur grew upon the air; and the rising breeze fanned the dog-roses and the may-blossoms from their evening slumber, until their petals were scattered like rosy rain; and then a march of tiny music sought to waken the sleepy echoes, sounding like the music of a tiny triumph; and, lo! a host of nimble creatures, with a speck of stardust on each brow, were standing on the edge of camomile-daisies, blowing into trumpet-lilies.

Then rose the Queen; then rose her maidens. For a moment, ere their flight, they paused, whilst Alcyone marshalled her sparkling train; and then away, away, away they swept, leaving in their wake a tremulous shimmer.—And once more the sleepy flowers alone adorned the deserted glade.

How pretty it is, at early morn, when a

grassy dell is sprinkled with clinging dew,
and when a hundred jewels of a thousand
tints are hanging to every spear—every spear
being a separate hall, where the glittering
hundreds dance, their thousand tints changing
the while to tens of thousands more.

In such a dell of dewy grass, but at the
evening twilight hour, high court of star-
crowned Queen Alcyone hath now been held !

Strange, where so many have lately been,
that the grass is unrobbed of its tiny globes !
Strange, that the sweeping of glittering gar-
ments has not brushed from each delicate
blade each lucid gem ! But those garments
had floated as softly as mist, and so the
dewdrops were undisturbed. And now the
hum of many insects fills the air ; and they
are circling around the head of a pale, regal
iris, beautiful in the rays of the just-risen
moon. And all the lesser flowers that
crouch among the grass are palpitating yet, as
if they had but just returned from other, higher

existence, than their own of simple, unknowing loveliness.

The maiden music which had come from them has silenced back again to perfume, and all the sentient rapture of their so late invested life has subsided into colour. And sweetly they all lie there, sorrowing not at their change, rising and falling with each breath of the evening breeze—rising and falling in mute obeisance to a higher Majesty, and pouring forth their added fragrance as incense to a loftier Monarch than the stellar Queen Alcyone.

Queen! O Queen Alcyone! ah! whither hast thou sped?—Look up! look up! for the night hath come, and the stars are shining forth.





CHAPTER VII.

The False Fair Fibre.





HEN he had followed Angelos into the pavilion, Sir Trisalonde stood silent for awhile, contemplating the scene before him—the rigid figure extended on the couch in the awful solemnity of lifeless beauty; the little, moaning, weeping child; the heavy, broken chains, that fell clanking to the floor; and the bitter witness of their galling weight darkly visible on the white round arms of the dead. All these impressed him with a feeling of wonder and awe: but soon he grew impatient; the stagnant, gloomy air oppressed him, coming as he had from the fresh, sunlit atmosphere without; and so, when Angelos kneeled down so humbly, and with reverent hands drew the little

child to his breast, as a devotee might clasp some relic, Sir Trisalonde raised the curtain, and, stepping back from the threshold, found himself with gladness again on the terrace-walk which encircled that many-chambered pavilion. A sensation had crept over him of great loss of strength; and, as he came forth again into the daylight, he said gaspingly,—

‘How awful is this place!’

Soon the bright sunshine and the pure cool breeze dispelled all feeling of dread; and the consciousness of his strength and of the might of his sinewy limbs returned to him, overcoming his temporary tremor; and thought then the knight, ‘That womanish Angelos bends his knees more readily than becomes a brave warrior: unworthy of a sword, he who can so facilely bow down! Trisalonde kneels only upon his adversary’s breast, and to receive his mother’s blessing.’ Then a quick beam lighted up the young man’s eyes, for he remembered

another to whom he had bowed the knee, and he added below his breath, a smile parting his lips, ‘And I knelt, too, to receive from the hand of my Princess the favour which adorns my helmet. On! on! to her battle! On! on! for her meed! Good right hand, good iron arm, I trust all my hope unto ye.’

He paused, for a sudden burst of music rent the air—voices and the noise of trumpets clashing together like the sounding of a triumph but through it went a refrain like a wail. The knight heard not the wail, he heard but the notes as of triumph ; and he beat his heel upon the ground with fiery ardour, as he passionately listened whence the music came ; but it seemed all round him ; if he looked towards the east, it sounded from the west ; if he turned unto the north, from the south it called unto him ; so he stood on that terrace eager and excited : then, even as it had burst forth, so it died away the wail yet in the midst. Then Trisalonde,

breathing more calmly, but his face still flushing, cried out again, ‘Good right hand! good iron arm! ye are strong, ye are mighty. Surely that music was a promise of victory!’

For those strange sounds proceeded not from any part of the tent wherein Angelos and Innocens were kneeling.

And now, Trisalonde, thinking to wile away the time until Sir Angelos should come forth, paced slowly round the summit of the mount; but soon he paused at an arched and flower-twined entrance, before which the envious curtain drooped not, for its full silken folds were gathered aside, and bound back by golden cords. So the brilliant sunshine streamed in, and there issued forth voices sweet and silvery; and with the voices came laughter, and with the laughter the breath of the melody of a lightsome song.

Sir Trisalonde stood irresolute at the archway for a moment, debating with himself whether he should enter or pass on; but the

singer, whose fingers were flying nimbly over the strings of a lute, now lifted her eyes, and, seeing him, quickly changed her measure, and sang, smiling, and still looking full upon him,—

‘Our circle’s complete, but its band we will rive,
To receive thee, a sixth, in our circle of five.’

And so, hearing her words, the young knight, bowing low, crossed the threshold.

Within this chamber were downy couches and jewelled ornaments, and strewn about were rich fantastic toys; and five goodly persons composed the brave company assembled.

One touched the lute; another held a goblet; a third bathed her hand, and cheek, and brow, in a fountain of rich perfume; another stroked with pleased fingers a glittering paroquet; and the fifth and last held high in her hand a bright steel mirror, on whose polished surface the whole group of beauty was pourtrayed.

'Welcome! welcome, Sir Knight! thrice welcome!' they all cried. 'Art thou heated and wayworn? then come into our tent, unlace thy helmet, and rest thee for awhile.'

Cried Sir Trisalonde, 'Due thanks for your courtesy, ladies fair, but, though the sun may be strong, and the road unsmooth, I grow not weak or faint; nevertheless, for a little space I will tarry among your sweet company.'

So the young knight doffed his helmet, and the long dark curl which was fastened thereon trailed upon the ground.

Then, in the midst of them, at those five ladies' feet, he threw himself on a pile of cushions, and, resting on his arm, he gazed delightedly upon the soft, luxurious circle.

And the drowsy melody of the lute half awoke. Then the one who held in her fatal hand the glittering goblet, with its dark wine rising to the brim, bowing to his place,—

'Drink, drink, O Knight!' she exclaimed.

And Sir Trisalonde, taking it from her, drank, and said,—

‘Thanks, O Lady, for thy rich wine.’

And the lady tossed back her hair, and laughed as she received the vase again; and, lifting it to her lips, she cried,—

‘I pledge thee, fair Knight.’

Then, from the wrist of the beautiful damsel who had been caressing it, the paroquet fluttered down and nestled in the hand of Trisalonde; and full delightedly he stooped his rough cheek against the downy softness of its feathers, and, stroking its neck, he said,—

‘Methinks that knight never crossed a more bewitching threshold; a delicious lassitude is stealing over me, which I care not to resist—just so much as makes repose a rapture.’

And she who was revelling in the fountain of perfume now sprinkled his forehead with its odorous waters; but he started

when she laid her fingers on his brow, for he recollect ed that the Princess Evangile had there signed him with her sign ; yet the powerful sweetness of the perfume quickly stifled the remembrance.

‘ Whence, gracious ladies,’ asked Trisalonde, ‘ may this new-felt languor come ? Now, I trow, I would not exchange it for a victor’s crown.’

Then she, whose hand still wandered among the strings of the lute, warbled forth for answer :—

‘ Why wearily ride through a long, long day ?
Why wearily ride such a weary way ?
How foolish, O Knight ! to trust in a dream,
The mark of thy prize a promise unseen.
Why listen for praise thou mayest not hear ?
Why strive for a crown thou mayest not wear ?
We will girdle thee round with a world of delight—
Thy guide shall be knowledge, thy evidence sight.’

And her voice so mingled with the notes

of the lute that he scarce could divide the music of the two.

‘Lady,’ he replied, startled for a moment by her words, ‘thy tones are sweet; but I am one sworn to an enterprise, and it becomes not a true knight to withdraw from his fealty. I wear my lady’s token, and ride forth on my lady’s war. She is fairest among the daughters of men; more to be desired is she than gold, yea, than much fine gold. *I* wear the token of the Princess Evangile.’

Then she who bore the steel mirror, from whose bright surface Trisalonde could perceive the reflection of that alluring circle, holding it aloft, cried out,—

‘I will wager this mirror that thou, Sir Knight, wilt confess that thy lady is less fair than these. I have heard ere now of the chill favours of thy cold mistress, and full loath should I be to bestow such rewards upon any sworn vassal of mine. Thou hast told of a token, but glance at thy shield; it

is a good device and a daring for a brave knight to wear, but never saw I yet the liege of the Lady Evangile who bore such for her service: little praise and scanty reverence at best is won by her servants; and who would be content to toil wearily, and strive sorely, to gain at last as a sorry meed the whispered "Well done!" which none save himself can hear? Ha! ha! ha! a noble prize for one whose device is a man's hand plucking down the sun!"

"Ay," answered the knight, "'tis a proud device, and shall be ever proudly maintained, while Sir Trisalonde's arm is strong, and while his heart throbs as high as now."

But Trisalonde, as he gazed upon the mirror, was so enraptured with the picture of beauty which was presented to him, that his eyes became chained thereto, and he sought not to withdraw them.

And, too, the bird ruffled the bewitching softness of its plumage in the palm of the

young knight's hand ; and at the chamber of his ear entered the trembling tone which owned the lute for its birthplace ; and the whole air was laden with the sweet odours of the fountain's spray ; and the crystal vase was glowing and bubbling over with the richness of its ruby flood.

Then every one of that goodly company laughed each to the other, and, bowing to the knight, they said all five,—

‘ Servant, we greet thee !’

And Sir Trisalonde, the knight of Evangile, slept a deep sleep ; and those that were around bent down about their willing guest, and *yet* they laughed.

But suddenly they ceased from their merriment, and, for a moment, each shrank back abashed ; but then, with one accord, they smiled their comeliest, as, rising, they greeted one newly entered.

Not less winsome now they looked than when Sir Trisalonde had first beheld them,

not less did they seek to charm. But Sir Angelos, regarding them not, walked straight through their midst, and stooping, laid his hand on the shoulder of the unconscious knight.

‘Awake, thou that sleepest!’ he cried, with quick entreaty; and Trisalonde started; but, seeing who it was that bade him be aroused, with an impatient gesture he turned to resume his slumber.

‘Awake, awake!’ said again Sir Angelos, in tones of severe reproof, ‘and quit thy beguiling couch.’

But Trisalonde answered querulously, ‘I am weary—it is the time for sleep—it is night.’

‘Ay, thou drowsy soldier,’ replied Sir Angelos, ‘night is ever near at hand to those who court its advent. Arise from thy couch, and the light of the King shall dawn upon thee. Come forth and look on high, and the shining of His presence shall visit thee.’

So the knight, with visage for a valiant warrior all too faint, rose up, though slowly; and, as he stood, he trembled; and, turning from Sir Angelos' proffered help, he grasped one of the fretted columns for support.

Then Sir Angelos felt a hand laid upon his arm; and one breathed in his ear, so softly, so tenderly, that he started at the sound of the delicate vibration.

She whispered,—

‘Shall I touch thee a string
Of my tuneful lute?
Sure the voice of thy King
Is mute—is mute.’

‘Hold thy peace, thou wileing one!’ cried Sir Angelos; ‘there is neither speech nor language where His voice is not heard.’

And then did Sir Angelos call to his companion eagerly,—

‘Come forth with me, and mount thy steed, Trisalonde, nor linger longer here.’

‘Drink first of this wine, O thou gallant Knight,’ exclaimed she who bore the goblet; ‘see, a lady offers it; quaff thee a draught for thy cupbearer’s sake.’

But he answered, ‘If I taste of this wine I shall thirst again. From the pure river of water, proceeding out of the throne of my King, have I drank, and I never thirst.’

And the witching one who held the mirror sought to tempt Sir Angelos to look thereon, saying,—

‘Saw ye ever such beauty, Sir Knight? Say, is not our group full fairly set forth?’

Then said Sir Angelos, ‘I have beheld as in a glass the glory of my King, and shall awake in His likeness; but thy beauty shall consume in the grave.’

And the breath of the perfume was wasted upon him; and she, who was bathing her hand in the fountain, now stretched forth her odorous fingers to lave his forehead.

‘Away! away!’ cried Sir Angelos; ‘away

with the abomination of thy sweet smell, for thou savourest not of the things which be of my King.'

Then the bird, whose soft plumage had so much pleased the cheek and hand of Trisalonde, flew from the damsel who was fondling it to Angelos, and sought to nestle in his bosom ; but he cried out,—

' Depart ! depart ! Defile me not ; for I am the temple of my Lord.'

And the bird's wings drooped, and it fluttered away.

So all those five fell back dismayed, and laughed not, nor dared greet him as their servant.

Now Trisalonde, after refusing, with shame and sullen pride, the proffered aid of his companion knight, who, with hand extended to help him, had urged him to depart, had remained leaning for very weakness against the gilded pillar, listening wonderingly, and with eyes riveted on Sir Angelos, as enticements,

which had proved to himself so winning, were by him, one by one, sternly repelled.

But, just as Sir Angelos answered the fifth of those false, fair five, and as they fell back from pressing their favours upon him, the column, which Trisalonde had believed so firm, reeled to and fro, and, with its fellows, crumbled into dust; and the rich drapery of that marvellous chamber, mouldering with sudden decay, fell about all, save Sir Angelos only, who were beneath, enveloping them in its horrible folds.

And Trisalonde, in the deep darkness thus produced, called out,—‘Help me, or I perish!’ And Sir Angelos strove to reach him, but he could not come near to, he could not save him; so he cried aloud,—

‘My shield! my shield!’

And Trisalonde’s voice came forth again out of the thick blackness in direful despair,—‘Help me, or I perish!’

Then in the darkness a light shone, glow-

ing from the midst of the shield, and it was in form like unto a cross ; and Trisalonde seeing it, for the third time cried out in terrible anguish,—‘ Help me, or I perish !’

And he struggled strongly to free himself from the trammels which encumbered him, gazing the while on the shining cross, which, as he looked and strove, burned each moment more vividly, more clearly. And upon the face of Trisalonde there was graven a look of unspeakable agony.

But the cross still gave forth its ruddy beam, and its virtue entered into the enfeebled knight, and was as strength to his bones ; and at last he arose free, and stood upright ; and he stretched out his hand, and Sir Angelos grasped it ; and then, so led, and keeping close unto the cross which was flaming in the midst of the shield, Trisalonde with Sir Angelos gained once more the outer air, where the daylight was yet full and bright.

But lo ! Sir Trisalonde’s head was bare ;

and the long dark curl which the Princess Evangile had bestowed upon her knight Where, O Knight, is that long dark curl?





CHAPTER VIII.

Of Evangelic's Mission.





CYCLE of four thousand years had swept by, bearing on its life-burdened wings the spirits of a yet imperfectly redeemed world ; and throughout that time man had been born, had grown up, and had died, even as the grass ; and empires had arisen and fallen again, even as the ruler and the king arose and fell ; and the world itself as a strong man had grown to the fulness of its age. And now the whole earth was crying out because of its dead ; but the sun still went forth daily on his mighty journey arrayed in his shining garments, and nightly went down to his glorious rest ; and as yet no sign of the One who was to come had been revealed. Prophets had stood up and pro-

pheſied ; royal lips had ſung the ſongs of Zion ; dreamers had dreamed dreams ; holy men had lamented : and now was ſoon to be heard the voice of one in the wilderness crying out ‘Prepare ;’ though men ſhould mock, and ſay, ‘He hath a devil.’

But, ere the sounding of the warning utterances of the Forerunner, in the quiet night time there were found men on the broad plains of Chaldee watching—seeking by the power of their intelligence to decipher the handwriting of the Most High. And before their eyes a majesty appeared which they had looked not for,—appeared in the eastern sky, and traversed its ſolemn gloom, gleaming with a ſtrange, new, awful purity, like the purity which men imagine muſt belong to a glorified spirit.

And presently the star stood ſtill. Then the men arose, and took in their hands gold, and frankincense, and myrrh ; and went, and before a cradled Babe kneeled down and

offered gifts. And round about the sun circled our whirling world, full three-and-thirty times ; and then darkness, like a suddenly revealed woe, covered the face of the globe ; and the earth did quake, and the rocks were rent ; and those that were in their graves arose ; but, albeit the sun did not show his light, wise men saw no guiding star.

And all the people who stood round about a cross marvelled ; and one cried upon the name of the Son of God ; and men feared, for they said that The King had died.

So once a star had arisen to manifest That King's glory, but now from the bondage of the grave a Sun burst forth, whose beams unquenchable shall shine more and more unto the perfect day. Yet few walk by that light, for the darkened eyes of men comprehend it not. Truly a King had died ; and those unto whom He came had turned their faces from Him, for they were not meek or lowly

in heart, and their ears were slow to hear, and their minds to understand, that which he had spoken unto them.

If they had known, even in that their day, the things which belonged unto their peace, what greeting hearts would have been lifted up! what earnest hands would have been stretched out! But their time passed by.

The city had sat down to eat, and had risen up to play; and a voice had cried from without the city,—

‘It pitieth me to think upon thine end.’

And the city had answered,—

‘Away with Him! away with Him!’

And so, amid mighty darkness, and the thunder’s roll, the veil, already somewhat uplifted by Evangile, had been rent in twain; and from the Holy of Holies Evangile had come forth, with a song of reconciliation on her tongue, and the cup of ministration at her side.

Could the heritage of the King be laid

waste while the King's daughter stood by? Could hirelings call the inheritance theirs while the King's daughter was unslain? For the banner of the Princess Evangile was upheld, and it bore a symbol such as gleams upon the shield of each devoted servant of the cross.

But the great ones of the earth, and the mighty, stood up against the cause of the anointed King; whilst unto the unlearned and the trembling ones who loved much, much was forgiven. And the hand of Evangile held up the weary heads and supported the feeble knees; for it was not those that were high, and not those that were mighty, that were beloved of Evangile.

But not of a hunted, scattered remnant, was the great King's kingdom to be made up: of kings He was crowned the King, though they acknowledged Him not; of lords He was ordained the Lord, though they bowed not down before Him. So, along the length

and breadth of many lands, did that trumpet of Evangile sound, whose alarum the breath of man could not awaken, nor his ear despise. A goodly fellowship had gathered itself together in time of old, but now did a glorious company arise, and a noble army die; and, though a chosen nation had rejected her, the subduing power of Evangile became acknowledged by one household scattered throughout all the world.

Many soldiers does she still send out into the great battle-field, and many does she still set striving in the quiet valley-places of the earth. The mean man becomes of equal value with the belted knight in her unresting war; weak woman, too, can bring her quota to the battle, and even the child may aid in the contest; for the might of Evangile it is that ever buckles on their armour, and nerves them to the fight. If they themselves, unleaning upon her, had power to stand, where were the need of her glorious

strength, which is made so perfect in the uncertainty of their tottering limbs? She, a fair arch, whose keystone is her Lord, is fitly framed together, resting on a foundation firm and stedfast; and these her warriors, no longer aliens, but of one kindred, are as hewn stones builded up around and upon her, and thereof grows a temple, meet habitation for the Mighty King. And, grandly towering above all lesser mansions, in solitary majesty does it withstand the crumbling of decay, while all about are strewn the ruins of broken fanes. With the silver tongue of promise does Evangile appeal to all to become her followers, and to flee unto her stronghold, lest they should be scattered over the face of the whole earth, having no whither to turn for refuge. She stands as did once a stately form among the creeping things, few daring to doubt her mission. For, as the solitary image of God then stood, clothed in his dress of pure humanity, naming the creatures of a

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lower mould; so now stands Evangile, and of her the whole family in heaven and earth is named—but named to a glorious sonship—to an everlasting inheritance, prepared for them by the high and holy King who inhabiteth eternity.

Gently she communes at the scarce-warmed peasant's hearth, and the fire is kindled.

Sternly she sits by the Monarch's throne, and the gold is refined.

Boldly she speaks from the Preacher's mouth, and the taught rejoice in an opened Fountain, whose water is turned into wine. Sweet tokens of the King's favour she is ever showing to those who willingly hear, showing of peace, and of the blessedness to come.

The Voice, which, on the mountain in Galilee, confided to a chosen few the great commission, uttered words which Evangile caught up, and which she is yet repeating unto men.

One day there was a rush of many feet, and multitudes pressed forward. A look, half of anger, half of scorn, was on the faces of those men, and the word, 'This babbler!' was on their tongues. And in the midst of the learned and of those who came to learn, of law-givers and of those who obeyed the laws, a stranger stood and spake, and, holding forth his hand, he said, 'Ye men of Athens!' and then he chid them for their superstition, and charged them with their ignorance; then, as a teacher, he taught those teachers, standing as one alone. But with him was Evangile, and from his mouth she spake. And so, among those proud, wise ones, the stranger was heard; for it was the word of Evangile which went forth, bidding to repentance, and warning of the judgment to come.

And the tidings which were brought unto the servant of Candace, as, sitting in his chariot, he read of the prophet, were the glad tidings of Evangile. And the voice which *we*

hear on the day of rest, sounding amidst two or three—we know the voice which speaks, why tell we of it here?

Sweet Evangile! at *every* time breathe into our hearts the message of thy love—and in every place; whether we roam among the thousand hills, courting the supreme fellowship of silence, or pace the crowded streets, in the deep solitude of community. And, as on us, breathe soon on all, for thy blessed name is Catholic.





CHAPTER IX.

The Great Rock.





IKE one feels who has ridden a weary way, at such feverish speed that he had stopped not to seek for his true track, refusing to read the plain way-mark set up by the Lord of the land, and who finds out too late that his toil has been mis-spent, that his labour has been lost, and that though he had risen up early and late taken rest, not even tarrying to eat bread, it had been all in vain; and more, that he had been riding from, and not towards his hoped-for goal, and so had wearied himself and his steed for worse than nought; even so felt Sir Trisalonde, as, dispirited and weak, he journeyed by the side of Angelos. Bareheaded he rode, and his visage was pale; his ashamed face was bowed

low over Loki's neck : not now was he singing the merry songs which erewhile he sang ; not now was he urging forward his willing steed, as though yearning to gain quickly an assured triumph ; but with a worn and weary countenance, full of discomfort and dejection, did he ride beside Sir Angelos. The road, too, had become rough and broken, and Trisalonde held his bridle with an incautious hand, permitting Loki oftentimes to stumble, for the knight was still wanting in power of nerve, like a sick man rising from a fever.

But Sir Angelos kept a wary eye upon the stony way, directing with firm and steady rein the steps of his white steed ; and so, preventing him from needlessly treading upon the rough blocks which obstructed his path, he guided him over them by means of his watchful care. And Sir Angelos scarcely glanced at Trisalonde's countenance ; but presently a sigh, which burst from the young knight's burdened breast, telling bitterly of

sorrow and anguish, caused him to turn and gaze on the face of his companion. Then, after a prolonged pause, Sir Trisalonde spoke.

‘Angelos,’ he said.

‘Ay, my brother,’ answered Sir Angelos, gently.

‘Angelos,’ continued the other, ‘from my youth up I have ever despised a degraded knight. And now look on me: without dealing one blow for the honour of my spurs, without riding one course for the credit of my before stainless shield, I am even as a recreant unto the cause. I have lost the whiteness of my fame, and the token of my lady is gone. Sir Angelos, I will ride back; I will claim my own at those traitors’ hands; I will force my helmet from them whatever may betide. Turn with me now, dear Angelos, and thou shalt see Sir Trisalonde armed once more in fashion that becomes a knight.’

‘Hold, thou impetuous boy!’ exclaimed Sir Angelos. ‘Return not to those fatal five.

Enter not again that loathsome, though once wileing, chamber. Trust not again thy foot within that dangerous place. Think thee of the thick darkness which is reigning there. Remember the terrible lethargy from which thou hast so narrowly escaped. Those miserable vain ones but served their cause—see that thou serve thine. Ah, Trisalonde, my brother-soldier! He whose servants we profess to be knoweth full well thy setting out, and thy courage, and thy much love; and how that thou art not wedded to that which is evil, but that thou hast been sorely tempted, and hast for a little while left thy first love. Remember the high vocation whence thou art fallen, and repent, and return unto thy first works; and then thou shalt overcome, and shalt not be hurt of the second death. Seek and obtain the pardon which awaits the erring, but penitent soldier of our King, and then ride faithfully forward, wearying not thyself so sorrowfully for the evils which are past, but striving

to fight worthily the warfare which is to come.'

'Ha!' cried Trisalonde, 'is not the hour of forgiveness gone by? Indeed do I repent me of my faithlessness, and desire earnestly to be received back into favour. Sir Angelos, will our King yet again call me His soldier? Sir Angelos, will my lady yet once more call me her servant?'

And Angelos held up his hand, and said,—

'Lo, Trisalonde! the sun is high, and its hot beams strike upon our heads. I see a great Rock before us. Let us ride thereunto. Its shade will be sweet and welcome.'

Then he continued, replying to his companion's passionate question,—

'Brother, a certain man had a son, who went forth from him foolishly, and afterward did wickedly; and the heart of the father became heavy within him. But, after many days, that son arose, and gat him to his father right humbly, and said unto him, "I

have sinned;" and his father put his arms about the young man's neck and kissed him, and rejoiced over him, saying, "He was lost, but is found." So, even as that father pitied his son, our King will have mercy on His soldier, who cries to Him, in shame and sorrow of heart, that he is no longer worthy to be called by His name.'

Then, as those knights rode on their way, the stony road began to grow more rugged and trying, the sharp-cutting flints being sometimes almost hidden in the shifting sandy soil; and Sir Trisalonde, albeit Loki obeyed full well his rider's hand, was often shaken in his saddle; and anon he bit his lip for shame, as he thought that Angelos perceived how sometimes it was with difficulty he could keep his seat. But Angelos saw him not, for he, too, felt his white steed stumble beneath him; and, therefore, speaking no longer, he steadily kept his eye directed to the track, dexterously guiding with careful rein

each step in his charger's onward progress ; feeling painfully the while how that the sun was pouring down the whole power of his burning rays upon his brain. Once, twice, and again he lifted up his eyes towards the great Rock which was before him, longing now most earnestly for the protection of its sweet, overshadowing refuge. But Sir Trisalonde, albeit his late seeming repentance, sometimes burst forth with a quick cry of impatience ; and sometimes rode silent with a troubled face.

Now, as those two thus journeyed side by side, suddenly, from the plain, there arose a dark, dense vapour—hot, fire-like to breathe. As it approached, it gathered in intensity and gloom, and, passing by Trisalonde, who seemed scarce to suffer from its near contact, it swept around Sir Angelos, completely enveloping him. And then did he almost reel in his seat ; his brain became dizzy ; his hand half relaxed the grasp of his rein ; and he swerved amidst the oppression of the black,

sulphureous mist, gasping hard as for life. He drew down the visor of his helmet, and buckled it securely; his shield, which the roughness of the way had caused to partially swing from its place, he settled firmly in position. And it was well that he did so, for in an instant a foe was before him—one who might have started up from within the mist, so close was he upon him, so noiselessly had he come. Then Sir Angelos grasped his sword, and cried—‘The sword of the King and of Angelos!’ And his highly-tempered steel flashed in the sun; for, although that murky smoke was like ashes in the air, yet did the blinding rays penetrate it, and their glare fall strongly upon him.

But, as the sword of Sir Angelos was raised to strike, he started, and his hand fell nerveless at his side.

For could this be a foe who stood before him?

Clear amid the smoky mist, close at his

good steed's chest, stood a man, clad in a leathern garb, and bearing a woodman's hatchet, which was slung upon his shoulder. He was young, but not softly favoured ; and his torn and brawny hands told of how a message once had come, cursing the ground for the toiler's sake, and of how therein the seed of thorn and thistle had been sown ; and his bronzed and furrowed brow pronounced again, that by the sweat thereof had been eaten the hardly-earned bread which had nourished that young man's flesh.

No wonder that Angelos had started.

For, in the days of old, whenever, worn with toil and weary with the weight of his burdens of wood, he had stooped down by a tranquil pool to lave his brows in the cool water, this same face it was which had then looked up into his own, this same form it was that he had then seen as he had gazed into the glassy depth.

And now the figure, as it stood before him, held out its arms to Angelos, as if yearning to

clasp him in a strong embrace ; and Sir Angelos gave one long and lingering look, while a great trembling came upon him, and a great and bitter struggle went through his soul and body ; but then he raised his keen blade once more, and calling aloud, ‘ Down, Anglos ! down ! ’ he let it fall on the dear semblance, whose outstretched hands and uplifted face were pleading with the human spirit of Angelos, even as was crying out the very life that was living within him. Again, again, those deadly blows, and yet, bearing up against them, that strange foe kept his ground ; still holding out his longing arms, still gazing upon the unyielding knight with those imploring, wistful eyes. And now the soldier cried again, ‘ The sword of the King and of Angelos ! ’ and yet once more its weight came down ; then upwards sprang that, until now, passive figure, and with its bare and sinewy hands it clutched the knight, and then, drawing him to its breast, it strained him tightly in a close embrace. But Sir An-

gelos gathered all his force, and, panting wildly—almost sobbing, he cast him mightily from him—but cast him from him with an anguished cry; and then he caused his white steed to trample where he deemed he lay. And forth from the bosom of Sir Angelos came an exceeding groan, as though that heavy hoof had crushed even to the dividing asunder of his own soul and body; but then, urging his charger, he rode full firmly forward, scarce minding now the unevenness of the road, which before had so impeded his progress.

Onward he rushed, and the strange fiery vapour pursued him; and the scorching rays of the sun yet poured down vehemently upon his head; and again he panted sorely: but now, at the noon of the day, when his brain was burning, when his breath came hot and fast, he entered into the shade of that Rock towards which he had pressed forward.

Then did Angelos throw himself from his saddle, and lay down his weary limbs on the

green pasture, whose refreshing touch gave to him a feeling of deep repose—repose as of sweet rest after a long pilgrimage, sweet peace after a sore battle. And, mightily towering to the very sky, was the Great Rock whose shadow he had seen from very far off, making pleasant that weary land ; and he crept towards a cleft of that Rock, and laid himself therein, knowing that he was secure in that sure Hiding-place.

Then Sir Angelos raised his visor, and stretching out his hand, he dipped it into the cool clear water which proceeded out of the side of that Rock ; and therewith bathed he his face, and therefrom he drank ; and then mighty calmness came upon him, so that he trembled no longer, but lay hushed from his tumult in that riven cleft, close on the margin of that pure stream ; and the shadow of the Rock was his shelter from the mid-day sun, whose hot fervour had smitten him so fiercely ; and his covert from the pursuing smoke, whose

deadly fumes had well-nigh stifled him as he had ridden towards this so precious place of refuge. He lay quite still, and on his sometime fevered brow fell balm-like drops, which ever came weeping forth from out the side of the mighty Rock. And the name of that Rock was ‘Wonderful.’

. . . . Sir Angelos knew not how long he had thus remained absorbed in the tranquillity of perfect safety, when a hand was placed suddenly upon his shoulder, and a voice, whose careless and exulting tones sounded strangely to him in that place, cried out,—

‘Ha! dear brother Angelos! erstwhile thou wert chiding me in ringing words in that I slumbered, but Trisalonde now must waken thee. Rise up, Sir Angelos! for thou art ever saying that we must press onward in our way. Rise up, for this place, with its deep shadow and running waters, strikes somewhat of a sorry chill into my else warm veins. Haste thee, Sir Angelos; we have far to ride.’

Then Angelos stood up, saying, ‘True, my brother, and we have also foes to fight.’ Then he added, as he stooped again and drank from that sweet stream, ‘Refresh thee, Trisalonde; take of this water freely; methinks I could do valiant battle in its great strength many days.’

‘Nay,’ said Trisalonde, lightly, ‘I thirst not. Angelos,’ he continued, ‘thou knowest that but now as we rode I talked sadly, asking comfort of thee; and that thou, my good brother, didst seek to revive my drooping spirits with thy grave words: but thy words were over-grave, and therein, good sooth to tell, I found but scanty cheer; yet as I cannot school myself to deem thee anything but wise, full modestly I listened. Now, Angelos, it is for thee to mark, and for me to tell—to tell a strange tale, too. Ha! I feel so strong.’

And the bareheaded knight laughed as he spoke, his eyes flashing with a dancing light, while his cheek and brow glowed with an ex-

cited flush. ‘Now hearken, Angelos,’ he went on. ‘Suddenly, as we ploughed our difficult way along, thou, my companion, didst seem closed away out of my sight by a thick and dusky smoke; even as it passed by my nostrils I found myself thereby well-nigh stifled, and turned my face to evade its baneful odour; and behold, when I looked back again thou wast hidden from me, while I heard, as though from the centre of that strange vapour, the whirr of thy descending sword. As I have said, I looked, and found thee not; but, in thy place, lo, one stood, whom I started to behold. . . . I remember, Angelos, that in my mother’s dressing-closet hung a steel mirror, and that, when I was yet a little lad, I loved full well to gaze thereon, for my long locks pleased me, and I fancied them just as fair as those that fell about the shoulders of my sunny sister Pharapha. Again do I remember, that, when I grew to be a tall stripling, I thought it not seemly for one on whom ladies often looked to show

himself unkempt ; therefore did I often go to my mother's closet, and issue thence so bravely set, that Trisalonde might have matched the front of Jove himself. And, oh ! Angelos, the face that I used to see in my mother's mirror I beheld beside me in the road ; ay, and the very silken garment which I once wore at a chariot-race was gathered about the limbs of the one who was by me. There, in the wild, terrible waste, truly my own shadow as a substance had appeared to me ; and my own sweet life, whose throbings quickened my heart, had started up as another life made manifest to mine : so I cried out, "Dear image of my mother's son, who art standing by my side as my brother-self, come !" Then I opened my arms wide, and he whom I saw opened his arms also, and we rushed each to the breast of the other, and with the kisses of our lips we kissed one another. But, as I clasped him hard and close, lo ! I enfolded but mine own self, and my limbs were locked across only

my own steel-clad body; and naught but the empty air, and the stony, sandy desert, were round about me: but it seemed as if such virtue had entered into my being, that all those heavy thoughts of gloom which had before been painfully weighing on my mind had flown to the winds; and I straightway said unto myself, “Why art thou so careful? take thine ease, be merry; thy path shall be smooth to-day, and much more so to-morrow.” Then a new safe feeling came upon me, and I said aloud, “I shall never be moved.” So, Angelos, grasp my hand, and give me joy of my access of strength. Now shall the King find an invincible soldier. I will strike down His foes as the blades of grass. Now will the Princess Evangile smile upon me, and place on my brow the victor’s crown. Ho, Angelos! let us go forth out of this shady place, for I feel as if with my right hand I could pluck down the very sun.’

But, as Sir Trisalonde spoke these words,

pointing to the gay device on the centre of the shield which he bore, Angelos saw the proud flush die down out of his countenance, and a pallor overspread his features; while he leaned suddenly against the great Rock for support, seeming as if else he would have fallen to the ground. ‘Oh, Angelos!’ he cried, ‘my strength is passing out of me, my life is drying up within me; a sense of numbness is stealing over my limbs. Oh, Angelos! I faint—I thirst!’

Then Angelos took Trisalonde’s right hand, and dipped it in the pure water which had issued out of the Rock, and with his own hand he sprinkled his forehead, and from its hollow he gave him to drink; and he lifted him up as he had been a little child, and laid him in the cleft where he himself had found such sweet renewal; and down into the deep still pool thereby sank somewhat with a heavy splash. And now, as Sir Angelos watched Trisalonde, the life-blood came slowly

back into his face, and he sat upright, and he said, ‘The Rock, and the water which flows out thence, have saved me.’ And he turned himself about, and behold! there was lost from him the shield in which he had trusted.

And Trisalonde stooped, and drank again of that water; and as he drank a mightier, holier strength than that of which he had before boasted, animated him, and it ran like new vitality through all his veins.

But now, borne upon the breeze, came a sound from the broad plain—a sound of great cries, and of trumpets, and of the treading of war-horses—a sound that told of approaching battle; then did both those knights spring to their feet, and vault each to his saddle, crying out,—

‘The foes of the King are upon us!’

And Angelos said, ‘Thou, King, have mercy upon us! Thou, Lord, have mercy upon us! Thou, King, have mercy upon us!’

And Sir Trisalonde and Sir Angelos awaited the enemy together; and the shadow of the Rock was upon them.





CHAPTER X.

Pharapha.





T was a fresh stage of existence---strange from its serene ease---into which the mother of Angelos had now passed. During the heavy years of her long widowhood she had been in poverty often, and in weakness often; yet ever had she earnestly tended her sole daughter with a love nearly allied to reverence. Sometimes, in the days of old, when, at their closing hour, her eyes had grown dim with much intricate work, she would sit still in her place beside the window, and there would steal over her mind a certain awe, which ever seized it when in the twilight she was alone with Ellice. Then, chiding herself for this peculiar habit of dread, she would cross the

chamber, and stroke the face of her daughter with her weary fingers, and, stooping, would kiss her eyelids. Was it to assure herself that the then still form was indeed animate and tangible, that the mother would bestow that unsought caress? For the being whom less loving ones accounted merely a shapely thing of breathing clay, was regarded by her maternal soul as the pure though untenanted shrine of a godlike life; so, when, with her great luminous eyes and by her questioning silence, Ellice would seem to ask wherefore her mother came, she would just busy her fingers with the thick plaits of the girl's hair, or draw its folds still smoother in their place upon her brow; but her spirit would experience an oft-recurring sense of solemnity, which, though a higher impulse than the love of her heart, would yet mingle therewith, and cause that love to be only a little lower than worship. And thus had the woman felt since Ellice, when a babe, had lain cradled in her arms—since she had

been compelled to recognise, on gazing down into the face of her calm, un-noticing child, signs which other mothers would have wept in agony to trace ; for then, this mother, laying the unconscious one upon her bed, had prostrated herself beside it, and had dedicated the sacred gift she had received of the still purity of that stainless life to an unknown, but craved-for deity. And so it came to pass that she believed, as Ellice grew and attained to the stature of perfect womanhood, that, while she folded to her breast her silent child, a consecrated thing, half meet for adoration, was clasped in her fond embrace.

But not alone with this passionless one had dwelt the mother in her widowed poverty, for there had been spared to her the son, who, both in later youth, and in the vigorous power of his grand, early manhood, had striven, with doubled gentleness and careful diligence, to bind the wound of her divided life ; his muscular hand ever finding therein

tender fibres wherewith to grasp her tired fingers; and proudly had the mother used to greet him as he bowed his lofty head on entering at the doorway of their lowly dwelling, calling him 'Mine own son Anglos.'

But all those days, with the name of Anglos, ended out of her life, and, with her son's new vocation, altered times approached; for now, as cared-for guests, she, with Ellice, abode in the castle of the lady Ullamere; and tenderly and daughter-like the sunny lady Pharapha waited on the steps of the mother of Angelos. The accustomed lacework was still often in her hands; and Pharapha would sit beside her, learning from her skilful needle the trick of leaf and flower and stem, beguiling the while the worker's mind from her sometimes anxious thoughts by asking tales of the old unforgotten life—tales, which touched close upon Pharapha's heart; and now and again the tears would steal down the face of the girl, as she listened to the stories of the time

gone by, unwitting herself how well she liked to hear them.

‘And then?’ Pharapha asked one day as the voice ceased.

‘And then, dear Lady, as my son became tall and strong he often sought to cheer me, saying, “Mother, soon thou shalt cease from toil; mother, soon thou shalt find rest.” And I would answer, “At rest! from toil! What dost thou utter? Nay, Anglos, I would not drop asleep while thy sister is still awake.” For as yet, sweet Lady, we were aware of no rest save that which we should each one taste when we came to sink into the ground. But one day he bade me call him Angelos, and no longer Anglos. And then, afterwards, he told me of another “rest,” which should spring up from that first still rest of death of which I already knew; and I felt startled as he talked, for he spoke of things which my eyes had not seen, and whereof my ear had not heard.’

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‘And dost thou now know the meaning of his words?’ asked Pharapha.

‘Thy thread is amiss, my child,’ said the other, busying her fingers with Pharapha’s lace; ‘twist it thus—so, over thy needle twice. Very well done! thy work will soon be as true as mine. Ah! what didst thou ask me?’

So Pharapha repeated, ‘Knowest thou now concerning that whereof thy son spake?’

The woman folded her hands in her lap, and her eyes fell upon Ellice, who was sitting on the rushes near, as she replied,—

‘Dear Lady, as drops of water descend from the clouds on the else dry and barren earth, so the meaning of the new words, and the knowledge of the blessing of the new rest, have entered into my life. Thy gentleness, dear Lady, has much of sweet comfort in it; but, albeit I love it so well, when the Lady Evangile passes by, in the calm beauty of her holiness, my rest grows deeper; and, as with

my hand I touch her garments, light breaks in on my evening time.'

Then Pharapha sat pondering for awhile, and presently she said,—

'Thou mother of Ellice, the Princess Evangile daily lays her hand on thy daughter's head; often I see her leading her along on the green grass by the still garden-stream; and, as she walks, she beguiles thy Ellice on by the softness of the path in which they tread; and ever, as at thy own old doorway in the oak forest, the Princess wins from her a brightened glance, and once methought I heard her speak a fluttering word.'

Then, the work-lesson ended, Pharapha went forth and communed with Evangile.

Now the lines which for awhile had been written on Pharapha's countenance had parted from their place, and it seemed as if in their stead there had been drawn sweet traceries of peace; for, even as on a writing-table of old, by the oftentimes reversal of the stylus in

a master hand, might have been obliterated faulty forms, ere the goodly characters appeared whereon the eye should dwell with pleasure —so those graven lines of grief, which were but stranger guests on this fair girl's face, had been smoothed away, and the perfect form of a certain holy handwriting had become manifest, clear and beautiful to those who read it aright.

As they walked beside the rippling streamlet, Pharapha said to the Princess,—

‘Ere our mid-day meal, my mother was speaking of Trisalonde: dear Evangile, he is my mother's sole son; will he soon return to us again?’

‘My Pharapha,’ answered the Princess, ‘thy brother hath ridden out on a set cause; and a soldier cannot cease from the strife ere his warfare be accomplished. Wouldest thou, or would thy mother, willingly see him come back from the fight, ere the great King be brought in? Thy brother went forth hopeful

and rejoicing, though he was girded not with the good armour which Evangile bestows upon the warriors of the King.'

'I ofttimes,' said the lady Pharapha, 'heard Trisalonde speak much of his strength; so, dear Evangile, sure he must prove a worthy knight. And when as little children we chased each other, oh! he outran me by the meadow's length.'

Then answered Evangile, 'The battle, my sister, is not always to the strong; nor must needs the race ever be won by the swift.' And she taught the willing listener of that strength which should conquer in the battle, and of that swiftness which should win the race.

But presently, when she paused, Pharapha timidly remarked,—'My Princess, Sir Angelos'—seeking to hear his name just spoken—'Sir Angelos was a very grave knight; methinks I never beheld so grave a knight before.'

And Evangile answered gently,—

‘Sir Angelos desired to go on a warfare, but he sat down first and considered whether, with the one sword and one shield which should be given him, he should be able to meet those who would come against him with many swords and many shields.’

‘But, dear Evangile,’ said Pharapha, ‘if Sir Angelos felt somewhat of that strength of which thou tellest, wherefore should he doubt his ability to fight, and so, perchance, half fear to go?’

And the Princess replied,—

‘Thinkest thou, my Pharapha, that when this castle was built, he that planned it sat not down first and counted the cost, to see whether the treasure he possessed would be sufficient; else haply, when he had laid the foundations, and builded a few fair chambers, he might have found he had not wherewith to finish it? Then those who looked on would have mocked that foolish man, saying, “Lo, this man began to build and was not able to

finish!" And Angelos, ere he rode on the service of the King, wisely pondered within himself on the might and worthiness of his promised armour, being not able to guage beforehand the power of the enemies whom he should encounter. Thus, though his heart was at peace, did his face become grave, for he was ready not only to fight, but also to endure.'

'And I, sweet Princess,' said Pharapha, after an interval, 'would fain hear from thy sage lips somewhat further of myself, for my thoughts are often vain and wild, and my words and deeds are often trifling.'

'Dear Pharapha,' said Evangile, 'thou art much like the vine which is creeping up yonder strong tree, and thy true aspirings and thy gentle graces are even as the tender grapes; and the vain thoughts and the trifling words whereof thou speakest, are the foxes, those little foxes, which spoil the vine, coming round about if strict charge be not taken, and seeking much, by their cunningly-devised wiles,

to seize the just-growing produce of my little favourite plant. But even as they that keep thy mother's garden will watch for and slay the foxes that lie in wait for the tender grapes, so must thou be ever awake to guard thy pleasant clusters, else, when the owner of the vine shall come, and look that it should have brought forth much fruit—seeking, he may find none.'

Then Pharapha cried out passionately, 'Lady Evangile, thou art so holy that I fear thee. How should a goodly harvest grow up and be ready for the reapers in ground that is scarcely digged? How should a garner be stored from a field but newly sown? Alas! I am out of hope—I will root up my vine, that its owner may not come and curse it for its lack of fruit.'

Pharapha sobbed convulsively while she spoke, and half turned herself away from Evangile; but the Princess put forth her hand and drew the girl gently to her side.

'Thou foolish, foolish child!' she said, 'thy vine was growing from thine own beginning, though of old it seemed but a barren stock; but, because One has come and grafted a good germ thereon, must it not be that the grapes will grow abundantly? Then, wouldest thou take thy plant from its pleasant garden, and cast it on a rocky moor? or wouldest thou transplant it from its soil of richness to the sterile sand of the hot desert? or wouldest thou carry it from the side of the running stream, and fling it to float at will on the water of the sea of the cities of the plain? My doubting Pharapha, cease from thy weeping, and trench up thy vine and dig about it.'

Then Pharapha laid her hand on Evangile, and said, 'Forgive now my silly talk, sweet Princess mine: thy chiding is as winning as thy praise. Thou hast made me thy captive, O Evangile, and the cords wherewith I am bound are silken and easy; but my mouth is even as a naughty door, and thereout creep

evil things that I knew not before could have lurked within me.'

'Ay, truly, my sister,' replied the Princess, 'thoughtless words, like unto those of whose utterance thou art now repenting, are full often causes of sore offence—offence which will carry with it a sure and certain woe; for words of folly sometimes travel far, and sink deeply into many spirits. The ear carries them to the imagination; the imagination, maybe, to the heart; the heart to the very soul. All words once gone forth are as winged messengers for good or evil, multiplying in their influences as they fly abroad; and so therein the power of a speaking peasant is greater than that of a dumb prince.'

'Ah! dear Lady Evangile,' cried Pharapha, 'I can remember quite well how my careless speech used to scatter as lightly and indifferently as the grains of sand from a broken hour-glass when the wind blows thereon. And some of those that sat by would laugh and

seem well liking as they listened ; while others would frown, and some look ill at ease ; but whether they smiled or whether they scowled, to me it was little matter, for the world seemed made after such a pleasant fashion, that, whichever way I wore it, it suited me full well. Yet was I sorry when my mother chid me, for that I needed chiding always used to grieve her, albeit reproof would ever come linked with a caress. Sometimes she would try if much tapestry-work would make me grave, by reason of its wearisome stitches. Then, again, was I sorry, for I loved it not ; and in the great toilsome pictures of battles and feasts, which with my mother's maids I wrought, there were ugly faces, which afterwards would show like evil goblins in the torches' light ; and I used to long to put my needle all awry just to mar their grisled fronts. And once I did ; but when my mother came and looked, she only said, as she noted the change, " It hath a pleasant appearance ;"

though I had hoped that she would hold up her hands in terror at the grand young lord's new frightfulness. So I never tried again to spoil our weary patterns ; yet I grew no whit graver as I toiled over my embroidery, for I only thought of mischief as I sat and worked. But, dear Lady Evangile, since I have known from thee the things concerning which thou hast spoken, I have taken much heed lest I should provoke through the frivolity of my heart.'

So the Princess smiled upon Pharapha as she answered,—

'Thy vigilance, O child, is of the King's favour ; see that thou cease it not.'

Then she asked,—

'Where is now the lady Ullamere ?'

'My mother,' replied Pharapha, 'drew on her tawny hood, and walked forth with the mother of Ellice towards the cottage yonder —we can see it hence—where a widow is weeping to-day.'

So Evangile turned thitherward ; and she too went down to the lowly cottage.

Then Pharapha, entering again the castle, ascended to the western chamber, where Ellice, still sitting upon the floor, had remained alone.

Now while, by the stream-side, Evangile had been discoursing with Pharapha, Ellice, gathering up from around her a handful of the rushes which were strewn about, had, with her ever-moving fingers, unwittingly plaited a crown of the reeds, and had laid it on her lap ; then taking it, and turning it round about, she had looked thereat ; but, again placing it upon her knees, for a time she had rocked herself to and fro : then she had lain hold of two long reeds, and, twisting them into a shape like a sceptre, had placed them athwart the crown, and had gazed thereon, as though she had been striving to behold outlines which were ever melting into confusion ere her vision could define them. And now, when Pharapha returned, the pale

hands of Ellice were clasped upon her yet paler brow, as she slowly swayed herself from side to side, with the bauble insignia of kingship lying mockingly on her lap. But the lady Pharapha came softly to the girl's side, and, leaning over her, kissed the smooth bands of her hair, the while drawing from her knee the mimic crown and sceptre; and then, hiding them from the sight of Ellice among the full folds of her own purple robe, she crushed them in her hand, and flung them abhorrently from her. Pharapha could not bear to see those ignorantly fashioned toys, for they brought to her mind a cruel scourging, whereof Evangile had told her somewhat.

Then, for the second time, Pharapha fell asleep in that western chamber, and the dream which she dreamed was on this wise:

She, and her mother, and the mother of Angelos, with Ellice in her right hand, were walking all of them together, and they were treading in a path which the foot of Evangile

had beaten smooth. And Evangile herself went before; and anon she beckoned them forward; and ever and again she pointed to a great light, which dazzled Pharapha's eyes by the bright whiteness of its glory.

And Evangile had changed her mourning robe, and was clad in glorious garments, with her golden zone yet about her waist. And, as she walked, she said to those that followed,—

‘Come !’

And a voice from on high said,—

‘Come !’

And Pharapha, and her mother, and the mother of Angelos answered,—

‘Even so.’

And the lips of Ellice moved.

And while Pharapha had slept, a sunbeam had entered in at the western window.





CHAPTER XI.

Angelos the Conqueror.





HE foes of the King are upon us!' cried Angelos and Trisalonde in one breath, and many a mingled sound of shouting and of clarion came in answer to their cry; and, as those knights looked over the desert which lay before them and around, lo! a nation had arisen, and was marching up through the breadth of that land, as a besieging army eager to possess a city which is not its own; and dust and smoke went before its face, and behind it followed after a pallid shape—a shape as of great desolateness. A black banner was in the hand thereof, and upon it was written—
Woe.

But at the head of that close-set squadron rode a knight of full graceful presence, who, as soon as he espied the two that were awaiting the battle, separated himself from his band ; and then, with lowered lance and smooth-tongued speech, he greeted those knights, and said,—

‘Far be it from me ; fair Lords, to avail me ungallantly of a vantage ; so turn with me now, and become of our number, and with us ye shall ride on our warlike quest, and the fortune of our company shall be thine.’

‘Get thee to thy weapons !’ replied Angelos ; ‘for by the name of the King before whom we strive thou shalt bite the dust to-day.’

But the face of the knight clouded not, and he answered,—

‘The sound of thy prowess hath reached mine ears ; thou art Sir Angelos ; thy name is high on the roll of chivalry ; I know thee to be one of goodly worship. Thy lady’s beauty I do not deny ; the comely features of the

Princess Evangile are as a proverb amongst us. Then cast in thy lot with us ; and we will ride together ; we shall find all precious substance ; we shall fill ourselves with rich spoil ; and we will all have one purse. Fair Knights, let us swear ourselves brethren.'

'Back again to thy band !' said Sir Angelos, sternly. 'Thy ways are false, and thy conquest is destruction; thy counsel is vain, and thy feet are swift to do evil.'

When Angelos had thus spoken, that forward knight, who had offered to him and to Trisalonde of his good things, flung from his hand a doubled rope, seeking therewith to entangle the feet of both their steeds ; but, by reason of their stand being upon that rocky place, the knotted web was cut or broken, and the severed portions, in their sudden recoil, wound themselves round about him who had cast it forth, and he was caught thereby ; and, though he chafed exceedingly, he could not free himself ; for the more frantically he

struggled the more tangled the cords became, binding him with their strong bonds ; and when, in his fierce fury, he tore them with his angry hand, the beginnings and the endings thereof—like the fibres of that river weed whose severed morsels each contain the vitalising force of a new root—multiplied many fold, and wound and wrapped round joint and muscle, constricting them into impotence.

Then the followers of that baffled chief, perceiving how signally he had failed, opened their solid front, and bore him back among themselves. So Sir Trisalonde and Angelos wist not how in the end it fared with him.

And now, as all the host thronged on, advancing forth from them came, with jewelled weapons and perfumed hair, a lord of courtly guise ; and he sorely beset Trisalonde. But Sir Trisalonde carried him bravely and well, and spared not the dainty limbs of the fairly-

adorned knight who had thus chosen him for his foe ; and many a battering bruise he planted in that richly-chased suit of armour. And suddenly Sir Trisalonde rode with levelled lance full at the plumed headpiece of his enemy, and with a vigorous thrust caused its fastenings to snap ; then he rose in his seat, and, from his battle-axe, there descended on the head of the other a blow, which sent him reeling from his costly saddle. And, as Sir Trisalonde passed on to encounter new enemies, he glanced at the fallen lord, and saw that his eyes were sunken, and that his lips were thin and bloodless.

Then, as he rode on, leaving Angelos in the place where they had stood together, the din increased, and the terrible army closed round about him ; and their voices were hungry, even as the voice of the howlings of evening wolves hungering after their prey. And now, not only from the south, but also from the north, and even from behind him

toward the west they came—only the horizon eastward was clear ; wheresoever else Sir Trisalonde looked they were rising up swiftly, and spreading themselves abroad, even as the eagles which are hasting to eat. Then Trisalonde began to be glad, and held his bare head high, for many were swept down before him, and some few even turned and fled. But of those that he smote there were that revived again ; and they that so arose to do him battle for the second time were full hard to conquer ; but still he felt no fear. And marvellous was it, that, among those morioned ones, Sir Trisalonde, with head unfurnished and exposed, should go unscathed ; and strange, too, that his foes, who, each one, carried a mighty iron shield, should not have been able to stand before him who carried none : but their shields were shivered and their casques were crushed as the unhelmeted knight passed by. And anon he held his breath with wonder ; for many

times, when, with the lance which he bore, he dealt thrusts which he deemed so deadly, his adversary would remain unharmed ; and, while his surprise at his own powerlessness possessed him, he would see his enemy stricken down by a blow from an unseen arm. Or again he would wield his battle-axe, and it would glance without effect from off the crest of his antagonist, who would commence to mock at him ; when, lo ! a dart, cast by a hand Trisalonde perceived not, would penetrate the scoffer to the heart. Thus, until now, those who attacked the undaunted knight were defeated, while he himself received no hurt.

But soon success and triumph were singing their maddening song in the ears of Sir Trisalonde ; and so, burning to merit yet more surely a conqueror's meed, he rode unmindful still further into the midst of his enemies, and emerged from out the shadow of the Rock, coming again to the scorching plain,

whereon the sun's heat glared with fervent fire.

Then, as he issued forth upon the plain, seven warriors, clad in murky armour, rode tumultuously against him, each bearing various weapons, all of which were alike murderous. And on the young man's head the hot rays descended, entering with well-nigh fatal fever into his brain; and he bent one longing, earnest gaze on the shadow which he had just forsaken.

It fell but such a little way short of him, yet of himself could he not regain it.

For, close hedging him round, were those seven black-clad warriors, of whom some were aiming at his bare head, while the others made at his undefended breast. So, gathering up, with final energy, his only hope, he couched his trusted lance, and plunged his golden spurs of knighthood deep in Loki's sides; but as, with feeble, swerving blow, his weapon grazed the iron gorget of one foe,

it snapped—it broke—and both splintered fragments pierced deep into Trisalonde's hand.

Then, while the heat of the day still smote upon him, with one bitter cry of 'Help me, or I perish!—one agonized look backward at the sweet shelter, he fell, and Loki stood riderless, for Trisalonde had swooned, and was lying prone in the trampled dust. And now did the spectre who followed that army stride up, seeking to lay his gaunt hand on Trisalonde; but, lo! the day was growing old, and the shades were lengthening; so the shadow of the great Rock came onward, and, as a cloak, spread itself over Trisalonde; and the breath returned into his nostrils; and the gaunt spectre fled away into the wilderness. Then those seven, who for a little while were thus seeming about to triumph, advanced all of them together, yet more nearly surrounding the extended knight, and hoping to gain him as their assured

prize; but hailstones fell upon them, and lightning ran along the ground underneath them, while mighty arrows, loosed by an unerring archer, stuck fast in their bodies. So, with cries, and howlings, and wailings, all those seven turned and fled, leaving Trisalonde full covered by the shadow of that Rock.

Now, Sir Angelos, save it had been to draw still closer to the Rock, had stirred not from the spot, where, at first, with his companion, he had been attacked.

When the keen strife had begun, he had called aloud on Trisalonde to stand fast, but, in the excitement of his first conquests, the noise of war had so dulled his ears, that he could not hear. And then did blows come down like thick rain upon the head of Angelos, but he felt them not. Sharp arrows flew against him, but they only rattled on his shield and fell harmless to the ground; while against the sword which he held in his hand,

as it flashed like a meteor round about him, none could stand up, for flames as of living fire blazed at its point; so, even as Sir Angelos wielded it, his enemies fell vanquished at his feet. Many tried to lure him from his place, half turning themselves to induce him to follow; but, changing not his position, he fought firmly and steadfastly, and with his shield he sheltered himself, and having done all—he stood.

And then advanced one, who from afar had seen Trisalonde, but had passed him by; and who had waited long before he engaged Sir Angelos, watching closely how went the day with those that strove with him. And he marked that he fought solely with the sword, and that he trusted only to his shield and helmet. Then that careful knight wondered, and he said within himself,—

‘If I come against him with the sword, his own will prevail. I will take him with cun-

ningly devised wiles. I will fix an arrow in his side with poison on its barb, that he may die and not live.'

So he rode stealthily close up to that unmoved champion, and let fly a dart; but the shield of Angelos caught it in the midst thereof, and the missile lay shivered at his feet. Then, in his disappointed wrath, he cast a javelin full upon Angelos' head, but the helmet of Angelos would know it not. And that powerful and subtle knight grew very furious, and, in his rage, he stooped to strike a sharp dagger into the flank of the white steed whereon Angelos sat. But Angelos raised his unfailing sword, and brought it with a cleaving blow down on the proud crest of his crafty assailant. And the head of that strong-limbed knight had been guarded with an iron crown, and so Angelos' sword in its winged descent came upon that iron crown, and it shattered it into fragments; and, with the falling tiara, its wearer crouched down, weak,

and subdued before that swift sword's deadly vengeance.

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Then, in a little, many horsemen, that had, until now, kept back from him, surged toward Angelos; and engaging him in, as it were, mortal fight, with sharp weapons and beguiling feints they sought his overthrow. But Angelos called still upon his King, and confided still in the good harness wherewith he had been provided by Evangile; therefore the King gave his foemen as dust unto his sword, and his enemies were ploughed like a field, so that the once terrible army became as heaps before him.

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And when, at the end of many days, the warfare of Angelos was accomplished, there fell, at the time of early evening, upon the

face of the earth round about him, a great silence ; and such as would yet have stood in battle array against him were thrown backward to the ground. And Angelos lifted his eyes and gazed upward—but the silence for a while continued.

And suddenly in the east a light shone ; and in the midst thereof a throne was set, and there issued thence a mighty Voice :—‘Blessed is he that overcometh in the name of the King.’

And a Voice spake and said, ‘Come up hither.’

Then Angelos, ere he had learned to sigh deeply for the long and peaceful rest from service, concerning which Evangile had discoursed with him ; but who, yet in the full vigour of his knighthood, was ready for aught that should befall him—then perceived he that the same Hand which had given to him the whole armour he had proven so well, did ease it from off him, and did vest him in its

stead with a fair robe. And now, thus clothed, he ascended up into the eastern light, and his enemies beheld him rise.

And lo! encircled by that light was a mountain, and upon the mountain was the throne, and upon the throne One sat.

And forms that Angelos erstwhile loved were walking there in white; and lips which had been once so mute were singing a new song, which no lower ones can learn: and on the forehead of each a glorious Name was written.

And over against the throne was one arrayed in fine linen, pure and shining; and, as Angelos went up thither, she leaned down unto him, and stretched forth her hand, wherein was a golden crown, and she placed it on his brow.

And then, together with those whom he had recognised at first, there came a host about him; and they welcomed him; and he saw that all were garbed in white, and that

each did wear a crown. And one of the twain that had been known to him looked very radiant, as though she had but just awakened to her bridal; and her hand was yet lingering on the golden chalice which hung at the girdle of the Princess Evangile, who still said to those that were gathered near,—

‘My mother, and my sister, and my brother.’

And on the face of the King was an exceeding glory, so that throughout that place there shone no sun. And ever came the flashings of lightning upon Him, and ever before His feet the golden crowns were cast.

Then went up the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of a great multitude, like unto the voice of many waters, and the sound of a great thunder; and, pervading the reverberation of that mighty peal, could be heard the notes of harpers harping with their harps in tones of unspeakable rapture; and the whole awful volume shaped itself to cry,—

'Alleluia. For the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth !'

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After a space—a space that was as a thousand lives, and yet as but one breath—they looked from on high, and lo! one bearing no armour, but dressed in the weeds of much tribulation, was slowly climbing, as the night came on, a lofty hill, leaning upon a staff. . . . And his face was very humble, but his eyes were raised toward a great light; and much trust was on his countenance, and fear, but not of man.

And in his bosom he carried a gift, which he was going up to offer; and with sorrow he thought thereon; and, as he went, he wept, for he said, 'Impure, impure.'

Weep not, Trisalonde, it is not the gift which is holy, but the altar which sanctifies the gift.

And a Voice came forth like as if from the summit of the hill, whose height it was wearying him to mount, saying, 'Come up hither.'

And once more, and again, and yet again did Evangile proclaim, as the sky opened in the east: 'My brother, and my sister, and my mother.'





CHAPTER XII.

Alcyone.





LONE, within the dimness of a shadowy glen, the radiant Sphere-Queen stood, clapping her royal hands above her royal head.

And she turned herself hither and thither, as if impatient of her unwonted solitude,—impatient, that, on this her well-known eve of most high state, she had entered the first upon the trysting ground, and had found herself unwelcomed of her favoured band. So, planting her foot upon the globe of a just fallen rain-drop, that the tall spires of the surrounding moss might not so enviously intervene betwixt herself and those for whose approach she looked, and being lifted thus quite high, she clapped her hands once more, and the sound

was as when little pods snap to let forth the seed.—Clap not thy hands again, sweet Queen! Why, sure thy maids have heard!—For yet a second did the Queen remain; when, quickly tiring of her loneliness, she stepped down from her pedestal, and a filmy mist received her, as she fluttered out of sight.

Soon, with the twilight's denser fall, came many little shiny ones glimmering through the dale, busily brushing the golden pollen from all the surrounding flowers; and they gathered together a glowing heap of the dust they speedily brought, forming therewith a towering mound as big as a new mole-hill; and their tongues were wagging the while they worked, and thus they merrily sang, 'Build we, build we, a stately throne, meet for the Queen of Space!' Then, among the tufts of grass, scores of sparkling forms appeared; and, of these, the brightest five beamed close around the pile of gathered gold; whilst, in their modest retirement, the paler throng, with

less of inborn light, remained melting irregularly into the far obscurity of distance, beyond where the power of eyesight could reach and subdivide them. On the fronts of those who tarried hard by the central seat shone gems, such as never were furnished forth from the deep dark mines of earthly hoard ; but, eclipsing in splendour even these, showed the luminous chain which hung about the neck of one; it glistened like pellucid drops just gushing into life, and was purer in its added lustre than when first it had been bestowed.

And now, with quick joy, did all arise, bathed in a new effulgence greater than their own ; for there, unseen to come, in the midst of her court and on the summit of her throne, reposed the brilliant Queen Alcyone, perfect in her regal state with sceptre and firefly crown. And upon her brow, yet rendering no whit more faint the milder light of her living diadem, blazed her accustomed star.

‘Maidens,’ cried the Queen, ‘but now I stood alone for the time of half a moment, and I clapped my hands for ye, but ye came not; tell me, maidens, wherefore Queen Alcyone stood alone for the time of half a moment.’

‘My Queen,’ replied Maia, ‘I was winging my way over the troubled main, when, triumphing through the roar of the winds, I heard the sound of thy call; so I bade the seas contract for my path, and, O Queen, I wait at thy footstool now.’

‘Ay,’ answered Alcyone, ‘the ocean was angry to-day, for there reached me the noise of its wrath. Wert thou fearful of storm, my maiden?’

And Maia said,—

‘Nay, O Queen, I feared not, but rose calmly above billow and foam, riding on the crest of the spray. And I beheld, sorely buffeting about among the turbulent waves, a labouring raft: a mother and child were lashed to its barren floor, and he who was

with them toiled with a solitary spar, that haply he might bring his beloved ones safe to some unknown haven. The lips of all were parched with thirst, and only the bitter brine came to sprinkle them, in seeming derision at their urgent need. And still he, that strong man, struggled on, and often strained his eyes amid the glare, as if to gain sight of some coral isle: his spirit was brave, though his body seemed waxing very faint, and his life consuming fast away, like as withers the waving prairie grass before the fire-storm's breath. Then, my Queen, longing much to gain those tossing lives, I spread abroad my ample wings to screen them from the burning sun; and remembering, O Queen, thy precious gift, I thought I would grant them a portion from off my peerless chain; but, while I unstrung three gems from its length, lo! they fell from my fingers as refreshing streams of sweet water, pure and abundant. So I saw the red tinge mount up in the faces but lately

so wan; and the father lifted his eyes toward the sky, and I noted some grateful tears; and his hand for an instant quitted his oar, as he held it upward in solemn thanks. And the little child began to play with a piece of the rope that bound him, untwisting its heavy end with glee, and laughing merrily as it slipped from his feeble grasp. And the mother . . . Oh, dear Queen, I was so glad that I had given them of my wealth. Then, as I looked to fasten my chain again, lest needlessly it should scatter, I found it already securely knit, and its circle as perfect as ever; for, in place of the yielded parts, appeared jewels of wonderful light. Thou didst not confer these three, my Queen; they came in the surge of the storm: if we sought to match them from all our store, we should fail to discover their like. Oh, tell me, my Queen, from whence they sprung, for thy knowledge is varied and deep.'

And Alcyone, whose earnest gaze was bent

on Maia's chain, answered, after a silent interval, with faltering voice,—

'I wot not, my maiden, thy jewels' source ;
but perchance from the throbings of those
three hearts was kindled that marvellous fire.'

And Maia pressed the rich treasures of
which they spoke to her breast, and presently,
still clasping them in her hand, she said,—

'Then, O Queen, thy summons reached my
ear ; but, ere darting to obey, I glanced once
more at those rescued ones ; and lo ! the raft
had touched a shore, and—I stood 'at the
foot of thy throne.'

Ere the echoes of Maia's voice were lulled
to their final rest, a wandering breeze went
rustling by, and Merope, with disordered mien,
stood close before the Queen.

'Dear Lady Queen,' she cried, 'I wait thy
most loving smile, for Merope has left trans-
cendent joys to pay thee homage now.'

But Alcyone, steadfastly regarding the tardy
maiden with a reproachful look, said gravely,—

'Child, I note upon thy forehead a strange unwonted flicker, not such as trembles forth from that of each of thy more placid sisters, although my pale Electra's sympathetic star has somewhat waned of late. But, sure, the fevered flame which starts from thine is fed by fuel of transient passion, human in its source. Taygeta or Celæno, say, have ye seen aught of this so altered maid?'

'Not so, O Queen,' replied Celæno; 'yet, borne on Taygeta's feathery plume, we, hand-in-hand, have floated on, after our feeble, failing sort, working thy gracious will, even to trenching on the appointed hour when thou didst claim our presence; but never have we crossed Merope's course.'

And Merope laughed as she exclaimed,— 'Nay, nay, we have not met;' then, bending low at Alcyone's knee, 'Dear Lady Queen,' she said, beseechingly, 'chide not; for now, of all the countless eves when we have met on earth, I least deserve rebuke. Asleep in a

lovely classic vale, I had forgotten time ; but, breaking on my delicious rest, a sound engaged mine ears, and it was like the snapping of little seed-pods for letting forth the seed ; so, knowing well thy signal, I roused me from my perfumed couch.—Ah ! sure in our higher place there is no luxuriant bliss to compare with the choice ecstasy of mortals' sleep !—Half lazy still, I beckoned a balmy wind, as, in its upward current towards these harsher climes, it hurried from the south ; and, casting myself on its docile wings, I put forth my hand to guide my way for this somewhat chilly spot ; but, drowsy yet, I steered awry, and pursued a wild career, until, more forcibly attracted by thy sovereign power, I saw at last the rays emitted hence, revealing to my sight Merope's Queen.'

Then said Alcyone, with tender sadness, as if foreboding ill,—‘ Hold forth thy hand, my wilful maiden ; I would fain judge how wears thy ring.’

And Merope, with closed eyes and slow breathing, like to one who plays at slumber, slid quite down at the Queen's feet. But Alcyone, bending over her, bade her arise; when, lingering no further in her waywardness, but starting up abruptly, and so dispersing one step of the pollen throne, she extended her hand towards the Queen, and, flourishing her fingers, exclaimed,—

‘Sweet Queen, is this thy ring?’

And Alcyone, with a startled look, cried out,—

‘Child! child! whence came thy evil toy? That ring is not meet for one of our bright company to wear. Slip it from thy sullied hand, or its fatal power will quench thy star, and we, a broken, riven band, will mourn our lost Merope’s fall.’

‘Once, O Queen,’ replied Merope, ‘thou didst censure me for laying an enchanting dream upon a maiden’s eyelids, and thou dost know that I pledged myself to visit her again,

that I might find out how she threw. So I sank, towards a lovely sunset hour, in the cup of a full-blown rose, wherein there rifled a laden bee; and I begged, ere it flew, it would break up the flower; and then, at my bidding, one shell-like leaf was caught by a puff of the jocund gale, and I mounted me up on that soft pink car, and with it was whirled aloft; when, uttering no mandate to say of my will, I was borne straight away to a western room. And I saw that maid in her purple robe, half veiled by her golden hair, as pillow'd she lay on her oaken couch, with her head on her fair white arm. I can tell thee not, Queen, of what she then dreamed, though Merope saw that she smiled; I can tell thee no word from her parted lips, nor aught of the light on her sleeping face: but only, that, ere at length she awoke, a beam of the sun burst forth from the west, and trod its kind way of ravishing joy to the soul of that slumbering maid. And when I perceived that thus

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happily now she could finish her former dream, why I quickly hied on my rose-leaf car to the dwellings of courtly men, for methought, my Queen, I would like to learn the living truth of the phantom bliss which this maiden in vision knew. And at length, after moving mid crowded haunts, as I searched through palace and camp, I found, 'neath the shade of a myrtle grove, the one who should prove himself worthy to teach the rapture Merope had sought. So I stole to the core of that human heart, and nestled me warmly within ; and fondly I whispered in blandishing tones some spells which were certain to charm. —And, when it was time to abandon my slave, lo ! I, who had conquered that captive heart, now found myself strangely enthralled, and bound withal by such welcome bonds, that I hardly could choose but remain. So now, when a beating life has woven itself with my own, can I rob my hand of this glittering gage placed thereon by my gracious lord ? O

Queen, there was spread my marriage feast,
when, drawn by thy potent sway, at thy
challenge I left my loved one's halls, to stand
once more in the privileged group which en-
virons Alcyone's throne.'

Merope ceased. And the maidens folded
each their hands in silent grief, but Asterope
wept. And the Queen drooped her head,
sorrowfully musing ; and when again she raised
her eyes Merope's place was void.

* * * * *

Then did Alcyone from her royal seat
thus speak :—

' This eve, my maidens, as I said but now,
I stood alone, here in our leafy glen, for
half a moment, waiting ye should come ;
when, caring not for unattended solitude, I
floated back toward my peopled space ; but,
having risen a little way through the blue
air, I hovered, before penetrating the depths
of our æther home, over this my favourite

land ; and, as I viewed it lying beneath me, embraced, like a diamond set in a sapphire clasp, by its surrounding seas, I rejoiced, in my queenly care, to know, that, albeit by the rolling passage of the parent earth it is yearly removed for a season from our sweet and more manifest influences, yet Alcyone, being bound of none, can visit it when she lists, even though the while her smile benign is felt in other regions ; and, that, during her withdrawal from the nightly vision of its island dwellers, they may still behold her myriad vassals' silver lamps, borne constant in obedient beauty, and, looking up, may with gladness say, " See, see the cohorts of Alcyone ! " — Then, sisters, journeying fleetly, did I plunge into the very midst of the innumerable legions of star-crowned forms that inhabit my vast domain ; and as I travelled on, gushing forth from them all, whether poised singly near to my either hand, or fixed in assembly close at the outer border of heaven's coruscant arc of

light, ay, and proceeding also, though in strains by distance rendered low, from the confines of those hazy clusters, wherein, save as I share it with my empire's sum, my force is nothing owned, there came upon mine ears, filling my whole self with its choice harmony, the music of resounding lauds. And, gliding swift along, unrecognised by the melodious quire, I, too, hymned out my unit part, constrained, yet with no unwilling voice, to join aloud in this the swelling tribute, meet and just, paid of my children in their double cycle-sweep, and families remote, to all creation's Source. And, as I sang, and quick in thought recalled all that in ages past I had observed of nature's plan immense and order grand as ground of present praise, my long intent to lay aside before ye all my pomp and form of greatness changed to full resolve. For know ye not, my maidens, that, although about me, with yourselves, in endless march, staunch move our countless crowds, yet I again, for

purposes divine, but lead ye on, not unaccompanied by equal hosts, in measured circuit round the mighty Cause of all attracting power, and into whom perchance we may become. absorbed at length? Then do ye wonder at my fixed design, as thus ye learn, that, where the most I seem to rule, therein I only serve the most? And can ye fail to understand, how, when I had retraced my track, and, present here with my so cherished few, heard Maia's tale of succour deigned to mortals in distress—a tale such as ye each could tell, and oft have told, of blessings flowing down to men the while ye watched and strove to show them timely good—and hearkened to the sad, sad history my lost Merope ended with her flight, which loving care perhaps had stayed—how then it happened that I did determine now at once, ere too much trusting in my power and faulty guidance, *ye* should drop astray, to put aside my rank and dignity, and reign no more, but

as a handmaid dwell among my former subjects, and retain alone my right to fill the central place assigned me by the Framer of the Universe. And while, with humble counsel, I from thence invite your sole reliance on the Mighty Hand, which, though invisible, will safe uphold for aye our else so headlong steps, let each work out her own allotted part in the great Author's sovereign plan concerning men; and let the cadence of our lasting song fall soft to earth in starry chimes, repeating ever in the attentive ear, with slow vibrations, words I even now can catch

‘Shall I tell ye, maidens, the words that I hear? Hush! hush! while I tell ye the words’

Then Alcyone arose, and stood on the summit of the gold-piled heap whereof her throne was formed; and she bowed down her head, from above which had departed the pale glancing light of her accompanying phosphorescent crown of tropic origin, but only to

glow, as persisting memorials of her regal state, from forms but little changed though wingless now, beneath the grassy pillow of many a sleeping daisy ; and, letting fall her royal sceptre, from whose tip the twinkling point had disappeared, and which lay broken and dissolving into mist at her feet, she crossed her hands upon her breast ; and then, looking round on the whole starry group, she said,—

‘ We all are ministering spirits ! ’



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